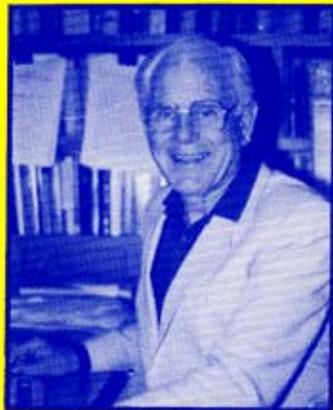


- Are there indeed two kingdoms undergoing a struggle for supremacy in history?
- Are these two kingdoms discernible, and does their struggle really affect us today?
- Is there an answer to God's seeming lack of control of history?
- Has Satan or evil any substantial hope of gaining control of history—even if only for a time?
- Can there possibly be any rhyme or reason in the tragedy of human living and the cruel rivalries of world's nations?
- Will genuine peace come to our world, and if so, how and when?

About the author . . .

Geoffrey Bingham is an Anglican minister. His experience as soldier, prisoner of war, farmer, writer, missionary, and family man, as well as theologian, has given him grounds for writing material which is Australian in tone, and relevant to the society in which we live. Some have found his books life-changing.



THE CLASH OF THE KINGDOMS

The **Clash** of the Kingdoms

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Foreword

During the past twelve months I received a letter from my old friend and colleague Dr Bryan Hardman, formerly Principal of the Bible College of South Australia, and at present Dean of the Discipleship Training Centre in Singapore. He was using a small book I had published in 1977 titled *The Dominion of Darkness and the Victory of God*. In commending the little volume, he suggested we needed a more comprehensive treatment, lamenting the fact that little had been written on the subject. In fact—as Bryan Hardman well knows—there has been a spate of books over the last decade or two on the subject. Perhaps the weakness of some of these books is that in seeking to be practical, and to be of immediate value in dealing with demonic powers, the liberation of oppressed persons, and other stratagems of Satan, they pass over the wider matter

of the kingdoms of God and of evil, and the conflict of these two kingdoms in history.

Endeavouring to write a book covering the area mentioned in the last paragraph is no small matter. In giving a bird's-eye view of the clash of the kingdoms it will be evident to the reader that many more details needed to be included—perhaps in the form of footnotes, documentation and extensive references—but then such a treatment would require the writing of a textbook, and in fact a veritable manual on the subject. Those who have read C. S. Lewis's introduction to *The Screwtape Letters* will be aware of his warning to us not to neglect the subject of Satan, his evil, and demonic powers, but at the same time not to be obsessed by these themes. I hope this book will give an overview of the subject of the two kingdoms, and at least be an introduction to a wider study.

For me the exercise has been most informative. The deep dread many have of the subject, their fear of the consequences of such a study, and their reticence to examine it have not visited me. The sheer triumph of Christ, and the immutable sovereignty of God not only act as spurs to such a subject, but they are really the heart of the matter. God's Kingdom is substantial and eternal. Satan's kingdom is a myth and is wholly without substance. This is not to say that Satan has been wholly without effect in his mischievous attempts to destroy the Kingdom of God, and subvert the creation, but the end result will be nothing. Nothing of all his seemingly prodigious efforts will remain.

If, then, this book shows nothing other than the miserable end of evil and the glorious consummation of the

Kingdom of God, the hours spent on its writing will not be entirely worthless.

Geoffrey Bingham
Coromandel East, March 1988.

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SECTION ONE

Learning Our Primary Lessons

Little is said in our churches today, and in our theology, about Satan and the kingdom of darkness. Whilst we say much more about the Kingdom of God, we rarely relate this Kingdom to the kingdom of Satan. That there is such a kingdom we must quickly learn, or we will be living in a fool's paradise, especially as one of the triumphs of that kingdom would be for us not to believe in its existence.

This first section of our book relates to an exposé of the kingdom of darkness. Paul said, 'We are aware of Satan's stratagems'. We certainly need to be aware in order to wrestle with the powers of darkness. We are so often vague. We speak of 'the battle between good and evil', but we ought to speak of 'the battle between God and Satan'. The battle is not between two abstract elements but between two personal beings—God and Satan. The two kingdoms that exist are headed up by God and Satan.

We ought, then, to give ourselves assiduously to understanding the kingdom of darkness. It is not mere morbidity which calls us to this, but the assurance of the victory of God in history and our need to equip ourselves for true spiritual battle.

CHAPTER ONE

*The Kingdom and the
Kingdoms*

The Idea of the Kingdom of God

At first sight the idea of a kingdom may seem remote to us. Busy as we are with our own affairs we might see the Kingdom of God as something of a religious nature—something theological. Again, it would be remote from us. What fascinates a person is what he—or she—is doing. We seek to build the kingdom of ourselves, the reign and rule of our own lives. We are selfish enough to want others to orientate themselves to our kingdom, and in fact to be part of it. We like to rule, and if we cannot rule

we will either resent others who seek to rule us, or give in to them with an angry sort of despair. Anyway, there is enough of the kingdom-builder in each one of us not to want to hear much concerning God's Kingdom. Yet we ought to make the effort.

In this section we will not attempt a profound description or study of the Kingdom of God. What is written immediately below should be sufficient for the moment. Later we will attempt a more detailed survey. What we should keep in mind at this moment of reading is that there are two kingdoms, one of God, and one of Satan. God's Kingdom is one of light and to be in it is most enriching for human living. The latter kingdom is one of darkness, and to live in it is, by nature of the case, unsatisfying. Nevertheless, it appears to be a very real kingdom. In his—Satan's—dominion there are innumerable kingdoms, those of peoples and nations, and those of persons, individuals who seek their own aggrandizement and security in this world. So great is the attraction of kingdom-building that we find ourselves in conflict and competition with other kingdom-builders. Mostly, of course, we find ourselves in conflict with God, the only true King amongst all the kingdoms.

The General Nature of the Kingdom of God

We understand the Kingdom of God to be the reign and rule of God in all times, places and conditions. In this sense the Kingdom ever was, and ever will be. God always has and will be Sovereign over all. Whilst we can

have biblical verification of these statements, we do not need them. The nature of God—as God—demands them.

The Particular Nature of the Kingdom

The initially undisputed reign and rule of God became disputed at a point in the history and action of creation. Heavenly powers rebelled against God and sought equality with Him, if not precedence over Him (cf. Rev. ch. 12). The serpent in Eden tempted man to similar disobedience, and autonomy. The Kingdom still obtained but had—and has—rebels within it. This is known as 'the world system', i.e. a system in which Satan is the head, his fallen celestial powers under him, and into which man has been caught by deceit, seduction and threat. This is sometimes known as 'the kingdom of darkness' (Luke 11:18; Col. 1:13; Rev. 16:10–11) and is a counter-kingdom within the entire Kingdom of God.

The history of the Kingdom is that certain celestial powers never rebelled, and there have been human beings who, though fallen in Adam, are people of faith and hence loyal subjects within God's Kingdom. Such are known as 'the people of God'. Seth and his progeny; Noah and his progeny; Abraham; Isaac; Jacob and his progeny, all represent the stream of the true people of God, loyal—by grace—within God's Kingdom (see Heb. ch. 11; Gal. 3: 9, 29).

The Old Testament prophets prophesy the coming actions of the Kingdom of God, and link it—one way and another—with Messiah, the Davidic King, the Son of Man, the Righteous Branch, and the Suffering Servant.

The New Testament—through John the Baptist—announces the coming of the King. Jesus also announces it, but as the King, for he was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism. The Kingdom thus came in the person of Jesus (Luke 3:21–22; 4:18–21; 11:14–23; Matt. 12:28; John 18:33–37). This Kingdom he appointed to his followers (Luke 12:32; 22:28–30).

In the work of the Atonement—the Cross and Resurrection with the vindication of the Ascension—Messiah defeated the powers of evil, and liberated men from the powers of darkness into ‘the kingdom of the Son of his love’ (Col. 1:13–14). The ‘gospel of the kingdom’ (Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:14; Isa. 52:7) now became ‘the gospel of salvation’ whilst still being ‘the gospel of the kingdom’ (cf. Acts 2:36–38; 8:5, 12; 19:8; 20:21–25; 28:23, 31).

The Kingdom became known as ‘the kingdom of Christ and of God’ (Eph. 5:5; I Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 11:15). From Pentecost to the Parousia of Messiah the victory of the Cross is being worked out in history as seen in (a) I Corinthians 15:24–28, and (b) the Book of the Revelation, especially chapters 12 to 20.

Only with this background known to us can we now discuss the Spirit in relation to the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER TWO

The Ambiguity of Darkness

Does Evil Exist?

Some ten years ago the Vatican issued a pronouncement that Satan still existed as a personal devil. This occasioned a snap poll in one large Western city, and almost without exception people admitted to believing in his existence. It is doubtful whether ten years has made much change in people’s beliefs on this score. Even so, the admission that the devil exists may have represented a polyglot of ideas. Those who believe in fate and luck seem to agree that there is some power out there which

affects our lives. There may even be a benevolent as well as a malignant force, and roughly these could be called 'God' and 'the devil'. For the most part, however, people pursue their own lives freely unless—from time to time—hindered by one or both of these forces. Humanism generally appears to be gaining ground and it has no place for the supernatural.

From time to time, too, studies are written on the powers of evil, as also on the power of evil itself. Indeed, there would be few ancient religions and philosophies which did not try to puzzle out the matter of what they call 'good' and 'evil'. Modern religions and philosophies are also occupied with the same matter. Even so, modern Christian treatments concerning evil—especially under the influence of prevailing humanism—are comparatively rare. There is quite a bit of shoulder-shrugging in regard to this subject.

Does evil really exist? If so, is there absolute evil? Is it—like its counterpart, good—simply relative? Can there be moral or ethical absolutes? Are good and evil merely concepts in the mind, mental stratagems to rationalize a world which is puzzling apart from such ideas? Doubtless these questions need to be considered, but are answers to them possible?

If we take the biblical view into consideration then the answer surely is that the Hebrews had some idea of an angel or 'son' of God which—or who—was personal, and treated mainly as an adversary of the Lord. The Christians carried this Judaic idea through into their belief-system, partly because the first Christians were Jews, and partly because Jesus Christ—their founder—spoke of 'Satan', 'the devil', and 'the prince of this world'.

The New Testament certainly has a developed idea—or system—of fallen evil angels, demonic powers, unclean and evil spirits and the devil.

Ambiguous, Anonymous or Non-Existent?

It is curious that whilst good and evil occupy the minds of our artists, script-writers, novelists, song writers and journalists, yet no one seems to come down to details as to the nature of evil. That men and nations do evil does not seem to be called into question. Even humanists think in terms of 'pressing beyond evil', and 'succeeding in the good' although they relativize both good and evil. They want to say man is essentially good and will be good, given the right conditions. Man—they say—has the ability to be good, and when he comes of age or obtains the necessary wisdom then he will express that good in full.

It becomes 'curiouser and curiouser' that no one can define evil, nor discover some personal head person or propagator of it. Whilst we moralize and claim to know what is right and wrong—i.e. good and evil—yet we cannot get at its personal source or controller. It is curious until we read the biblical nature of the one called 'the devil' or 'Satan'.

One of the things we read is that the devil is *deceptive*. Indeed he goes out to deceive the nations as nations and the whole world as a system. St. Paul calls him 'the god of this world' and claims that he 'blinds the eyes of those that believe not', i.e. do not believe in God or His Christ.

He does this so that they cannot see the Gospel and so understand the glory of God.

He also uses *seduction*. He entrances his listeners with ideas which promise satisfaction, fullness of life, and even ecstasy. The thought-life of his victims becomes full of promise and some kind of assurance that all will be well. His hosts of supernatural helpers also practice deception and seduction, entrapping the unwary.

For those who oppose him—doubtless believing he exists—he uses strong threats and *coercion*. Hence, he is called a roaring lion ‘seeking whom he may devour’. Man is his prey, and his roars and cries fill human beings with dread. Even that fear is of a nameless kind. Human beings still do not know where it comes from, and the anonymity of it makes it more terrible.

It is true, then, that this prince of evil can never be pinned down. There is ambiguity about him, anonymity and great doubt that he even exists. Human beings of a certain ilk rationalize him away, and pour scorn on the idea of hosts of supernatural creatures which aid him to organize and extend evil on our planetary system.

Certainly this master of all evil has succeeded wonderfully when he convinces multitudes that he does not exist. He is also successful when he terrorizes those who believe he exists. If he can give himself greatness, and impress them with what seems to be mighty power, then he can paralyse them in their fright and denude them of assurance and peace in life.

CHAPTER THREE

The Unmasking of Evil—I

The Problem of the Ontological in Regard to Origins

People who hold the biblical view of creation, i.e. that everything has an origin or beginning, are intellectually puzzled by the idea of the *origin* of evil. Non-biblical systems do not have this problem. They simply posit that evil has ever been and has existed alongside good. Thus the universe is dualistic, being basically good and evil or having good and evil within it. Some systems work it out that good will triumph over evil, whilst other dualistic systems see no solution to the matter. These systems

and others with them see that which is material in nature as being evil or harbouring the evil, and insist that true spirituality lies beyond the material. Of course such 'spirituality' is difficult to define, especially as it is generally assumed to be good. In monism good and evil are really two sides of the one thing so that evil is essential to the good, as indeed good to the evil!

The Judaic-Christian belief is that God who is good, designed and created a universe in which inherently there is no evil. When this creation was completed God saw that 'it was very good'. If inherently there is evil in creation then surely that reflects upon God. Surely He too has evil and this is shown in His handiwork. The universe is not ontologically good. By 'ontological' we mean things as they are essentially, which means—in practice —things as they are functionally.

If there be a devil and this devil has other evil powers which he controls and uses, then such a devil and such powers must have been created by God. Again, if man be a sinner, and God has created him, then there is weakness in God's creation. The fact that he was made of 'the dust of the earth' must mean an *essential* moral weakness in that dust! Whilst God may have sufflated man from Himself with 'the breath of life', this would seem to posit a dualism, i.e. the man-of-dust is capable of sin, but the sufflation of God makes him capable of good!

Certainly it is a baffling matter, yet also simple of solution. God did not create men and angels as evil. Ontologically they are good. Created as free creatures they were given the ability to make choices. Had this ability been withheld they could not be called true creatures. They would have been contradictions

of creatures and as such, passive slaves of God without choice to obey or disobey Him. By nature of the case their choice had to be a genuine one. To choose wrongly was to go against their ontological nature as originating from God, and being one with Him. It was to bring them into an anti-ontological choice, and even an ante-ontological choice, matters which we shall have to discuss.

There is No Ontological Origin of Evil

The matter of the so-called origin of evil has been put forward in so many ways. The rebellion of supernatural powers against God is described in the Scriptures, as also is the rebellion of man against God. These we shall examine, but since evil did not exist in creation prior to these acts of rebellion, then evil cannot be said to have an ontological origin. It had an *apparent* origin, but not an *essential* one. This being so, we cannot speak of a *primary* origin of evil even though we can speak in a very loose way of a secondary *origin* of evil.

A Problem of Words

It is here we have a problem of words. We would expect that which is ontological to have words to express it. Thus we have no problem in speaking of the origins of man, supernatural powers and creation as a whole. Since evil and sin were not created but are elements which are anti-creation or ante-creation, then words which apply properly to matters ontological cannot apply properly to matters which are unontological, anti-ontological or

ante-ontological. In fact to speak of anything unontological we have to borrow true words in order to surmount our difficulty in thought and expression. We must conclude, then, that a word such as origin will be used in regard to evil, but not *properly* so.

Words Posit Realities

Once we begin to speak of ‘the origin of evil’, then we give reality to evil. If we say, ‘Evil has no *real* being’, then we are forced to say that sin has no reality. What we mean is that sin has no ontological reality, but that it is ‘a reality’ in that we recognize it as a force and power. Even so, we must insist that it has no ontological reality. Indeed, we can biblically argue that in ‘the regeneration of the world’ there will be a heaven and earth in which no evil will exist. This being the case we can argue eschatologically that sin and evil have never had ontological reality. They have always been perversions of reality but never true expressions of it. If we are driven—by nature of the case—to use the word reality for evil, then we must keep in mind its actual unreality. Indeed, we must always see it as an attack on reality, i.e. the essential goodness of God as expressed in His true creation. This reality is often known as ‘the truth’.

A Methodology of Examination of Biblical Good and Evil

Many biblical scholars who examine the matter of personal evil powers see the writers of the Scriptures as

drawing upon sources outside the worship and belief-systems in primitive Israel. These scholars do not see a biblical ontology as a system revealed by God through His Spirit, but as a system of cultural and religious rationalizations as Israel lived with its patriarchal back-ground, (i.e. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob), its Egyptian background, its existence in Canaan, and then the influences that came upon Jews during the exile and the dispersions it endured. Such scholars do not enquire as to the *ontological* nature of the elements biblical writers are supposed to have used from other cultures. By this we mean that such scholars are not arguing for or against the system of thought which Israel held, nor are they evaluating the elements which they say have come from other cultures. The evaluation is a *non sequitur*.

Other scholars see the Scriptures as having a unitive view of good and evil which is a constant throughout the Bible. If ever the Judaic community or its biblical writers drew upon any source it did not constitute syncretism. The community believed they had a sufficient under-standing of the ontological, and so an understanding of good and evil. When St Paul says that God gave to Israel the gifts of ‘the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises’, then he saw that as a unitive whole. Thus when he adds, ‘To them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ’, he completes that unitive structure of thought, religion and culture.

It is on this basis we will seek to discuss the matter of good and evil and the clash of the two kingdoms—that of light and that of darkness.

CHAPTER FOUR

*The Unmasking
of Evil—II***Was There Evil Present at Creation?**

In Job 38:1–7 God described pictorially to His suffering servant the happening of creation. Consonant with the descriptions of Genesis chapters 2 and 3, everything is assumed as *good*. It was then ‘the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy’. In this Hebrew parallelism the morning stars and the sons of God are celestial beings. They were there prior to creation, and there is no suggestion that there had been an angelic rebellion.

In Genesis 1:1–2 the record reads, ‘In the beginning

God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters’. To some minds ‘without form and void’ represents a form of chaos which is not consonant with their view of God’s perfection. Hence some scholars envisage that the actions of verses 1 and 2 are varied, i.e. that God created ‘in the beginning’ and so there was a whole perfect creation but that the state ‘without form and void’ of verse 2 may mean that between that original creation of verse 1, and the chaos of verse 2 (Heb: *tohu wa bohu*) some kind of conflict happened whereby the chaos eventuated. Some insist that the proper translation of verse 2 is ‘and the earth *became* without form and void’. Some would then conclude that the angelic rebellion happened prior to the creation of man. Indeed they would say that God was really on a second work of creation in Genesis 1:2ff.

If the pictorial presentation to Job of creation covers only verse 1 of Genesis chapter 1, then certainly evil was not present. If, however, it covers the accounts of the first two chapters of Genesis, then it would seem evil was not present in the so-called second work of creation.

Rahab and the Creation Account

The fact of the ‘without form and void’ need not mean that the chaos was necessarily incongruent with God and the form that ought to have been there as some critics assert. There is, however, the mention of a Rahab (not the harlot of Joshua 2:1–21) in the poetical books of the Old Testament (Job 9:13; 26:12; Ps. 87:4; 89:10) and in

Isaiah 30:7 and 51:9. From Job 26:12 it would appear that Rahab was a great monster which disturbed the deep, and some have linked this with the myth of the helpers of Tiamut in the Babylonian creation account, Rahab being the disturber of the deep and causing the chaos.

When we look more closely at the Rahab monster of the Old Testament we see it linked with Egypt as a powerless Rahab, a serpent which has 'been stilled', i.e. defeated. There is no need, therefore, to think of a Babylonian myth being incorporated into the Genesis accounts of creation. We may, then, conclude that no power of evil had anything to do with creation, and that indeed prior to the completion of creation, evil was not a known force.

Satan and His 'Origins'

The Fact of Satan

We begin first with the fact of Satan as we find him named in the Old Testament. This Hebrew noun *satan* is derived from the verb 'to lie in wait for' and so means 'an adversary'. It is used in Numbers 22:22 to describe the angel of the Lord who opposed Balaam driving his ass. It is also used in I Samuel 29:4, referring to David as a possible adversary of the Philistines, and in I Kings 11:14, 23, 25 to denote Solomon's political adversaries. Psalm 109:6 uses the term 'accuser', suggesting in this case one who lies in a lawcourt against an innocent defendant.

The idea of an *accuser* is seen in the first two chapters of the book of Job. The definite article is added to the

noun and the name 'the Adversary' is used. In Job 1:6, Satan is numbered among the sons of God, i.e. the angels. In Zechariah 3:1, Satan is standing at the right hand of Joshua the high priest and is *accusing* him to the Lord. Joshua appears clothed in filthy garments. In Job chapters 1 and 2, Satan virtually accuses Job of not being a person of integrity, and by so doing infers cynically that every man has his price, so that let Job but suffer and he will curse God. It appears that Satan sees no good in man created by God, and in the Book of the Revelation (12:10) he is known as 'the accuser of the brethren', i.e. of the redeemed. He does not merely accuse the guilty.

I Chronicles 21:1 says, 'Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel'. II Samuel 24:1 speaks of the Lord being angry against Israel, and inciting David to number them. Without attempting a reconciliation of these two Scriptures we can recognize that Satan sought to harm the people. Thus with other references to him in mind we can see that in the Old Testament Satan is a factual creature who has no love for God or humanity. He has certain intentions which are linked with his rest-less 'going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it', which would seem to indicate his critical appraisal of God's creation, and even his desire to do harm. Such ideas are certainly confirmed in the New Testament, but at the moment we turn from the *fact* of Satan to what we might call his *origin*.

The 'Origin' of Satan

We have suggested before that there can be no ontological devil but—at the most—some created being

which has turned against his own ontological reality. On this principle, sin, Satan, and all forms of evildoers—as indeed evil itself—cannot have authentic being.

Two passages are often quoted concerning Satan, namely Ezekiel chapter 28—in particular verses 11–19—and Isaiah 14:12–14. Many commentators and scholars deny that they can be applied to Satan or the devil. The first is obviously applied to the king of Tyre, and the second to the king of Babylon. Even so, the principles of evil in both these passages relate to Satan himself, since in Ezekiel the creature was in Eden, and in Isaiah the king is addressed, ‘O Day Star, Son of Dawn!’, i.e. Lucifer. Tyre is a city of evil, and Babylon represents a whole evil world system.

In Ezekiel chapter 28 the creature in Eden was ‘perfect in beauty’ and gloriously adorned, ‘You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty’. This one was on ‘the holy mountain of God’. The key to its temptation lies in verses 15 and 17, ‘You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, *till iniquity was found in you*. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour’. ‘Till iniquity was found in you’ is a quite remarkable statement. It does not seek to explain *how* that could be so, but puts it down to self-infatuation. We can understand this evil principle quite easily. It is the closest we will ever come to knowing the (so-called) origin of evil.

In Isaiah 14:12–14 it is ambition which expresses the evil of Lucifer. He desires to set his throne above the stars of God, i.e. above the angels of God, and to sit on the mount of the assembly, that is in the heavenly court as

a great one. In short he wishes to be as—or like—the Most High. He will equal—if not surpass—God Him-self!

The fact that none of this is difficult for us to understand tells us it is the very heart of all evil. That which was created by God, chose to go against God, and to establish its own rule, its own kingdom, and its autonomy over against the rule of God. This is as close as we can come to speaking of the origin of Satan and evil.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Significance of Satan

The Battle of God and Evil

It is a simple enough matter to look through the Scriptures, pick out verses, put them together as skilfully as possible, and develop a thesis about one called Satan, and given other names such as Accuser, Slanderer and so on. It is another matter altogether to draw out the significance of the biblical material one has gathered. We are certainly not going to be able to do this until the wider ramifications are studied. Even so, this is not the point of this section.

The point of this section is what the coming of Satan

and all evil means in regard to God who is Creator, and man who has been created. We know there are people who live in terror of death, and many who live not only in terror of death but also fear of life. We all know some-thing of the guilt of being imperfect creatures in this world, and also the guilts of our sins, i.e. the things we have done which are wrong, and the things we have failed to do that are right.

Every day a veritable host of psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, welfare workers, doctors, clergy and others seek to help the human race to make its way in this life and this world. There are people heavy in conscience, wounded in their spirits, scarred in their memories who are unable to cope with life, let alone the thought of death, and what might lie beyond the grave. The world of immorality, cruelty, theft, rape and murder is horrifying to persons whether they be young or old. 'Countless thousands mourn man's inhumanity to man.' Most frightening is the thought that anyone of us is capable of almost anything that is evil although we try to thrust that thought away from us.

What then shall we think of the devil?

A Valuation of Evil

Evil is notoriously difficult to define. We all think we know what is right and what is wrong. We recognize to a fair degree our own failure to do right, and the regrettable elements of our wrong-doing. Evil seems to be some element or power beyond even human wrong-doing. It has a grim note to it, and brings an awful sense of

foreboding, drawing us into fear and despair. True, this may be the misplaced dread of morbid minds, but humour seems only temporarily to displace it. Most pleasures seem to have a maggot in their midst. Are we wrong to sense evil, and can we escape the unease that it is said to bring to us?

It is difficult to answer this last question or dispel the apprehension we feel. The rare moments of well-being and joy which we have seem to be necessarily temporary. When we face the tragedies of vast genocides such as happened under Suliman the Turk in Armenia, Hitler in Europe and Stalin in the USSR, we shudder at the evil of which the human race seems capable. Those who have witnessed a man in the throes of *delirium tremens* (D.T.s) are shocked at the horror human beings can know.

It seems we cannot do without a Master of Evil, Satan the personal devil, and with him other cohorts of evil. Is this then an excuse for our human sinfulness and cruelty? Can we make Satan the scapegoat for human evil, or is he, in fact, a creature of vast evil, and evil which is beyond even human capacity?

A Suspended Judgement of Satan's Significance

We cannot easily give an answer to the question above. We must enquire concerning the biblical material we have at hand. As God can only be known by revelation, so only can Satan and his aides be known by revelation—a biblical revelation. Research into the occult, magic, wizardry, witchcraft, divination, necromancy and other parasensory elements may confirm to us the belief

that there are supernatural powers which are not friendly to mankind, but the research cannot reveal the goals for which they work—if indeed there are such parasensory and supernatural powers—nor can it reveal the principles by which they work, or the constraint that motivates them in the service of evil.

I felt it would be helpful for us to withdraw from the materials presented by the Scriptures in order to meditate on the human dilemma in the face of such evil. We are bound to ask questions such as, 'Is God really in control of His creation? Did He make a mistake in giving created beings the right of self-choice? Could not things have been arranged in other ways, seeing that God is all powerful? Could not God give us a creation in which all things may be at peace?'

There are also the questions which human fear asks, such as, 'Does this mean I may be destroyed by evil? Will I know terrible judgement after death? Will I meet intolerable punishment? Is God a grim Judge who will condemn to lostness and darkness? Is it even possible that the devil is stronger than God?'

We surely must seek answers to these sad questions. We must discover some sense and rationality in the whole matter of good and evil, and the conflict that comes from the clash of the two.

CHAPTER SIX

The Action of Satan in History—I

His General Goal and Intention

If it is permissible to use the materials found in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, then we can adduce the idea that Satan is blinded by his own beauty and wisdom, seeks to be *as* God or even to dethrone Him in favour of himself, so that he will be the prime mover in history, and be the centre of creation's worship. One might reasonably ask, 'How could anything that is merely a creature supersede the Creator?'. It is self-obvious that such a proposition is impossible. No rational creature could hope to achieve such a goal.

The question then arises, 'Is evil rational?'. When we are moved by pride, hatred, anger and ambition, do we allow anything to get in our way? These emotional elements are part of irrationality and they compound it. We may know what truth is, deeply down within us, but we fight it. Anger, ambition and pride seek to ignore or subvert the truth. We go on our own way, blindly. The hidden thought that we may not succeed drives us more deeply into the will to succeed. Thus we live in a contra-diction.

If human beings are like that, no less Satan. Man prior to his fall into sin had a good attitude of mind, and the true trust and simplicity which accompany wisdom. This he lost when he rebelled against God. Ezekiel 28:17 gives the principle, 'Your heart was proud because of your beauty; *you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendour*'. Because this once glorious creature—Lucifer—lost his guilelessness, he therefore lost his true wisdom. In Romans 1:21–22, it is said of man, 'although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened'. The same must be said of Satan. His hideous intentions are both blasphemous and idiotic, and his mind is blinded by his ambition. It appears that he knows on the one hand that he will never win, and on the other that he refuses this fact (cf. Rev. 12:12; and II Thess. 2:3–4).

We repeat: his goal is to equal or supersede God. To do this he must gain control of supernatural beings, and capture mankind. Impossible as this task appears to be by the very nature of the case, he nevertheless persists. If we fail to see this, and remain 'ignorant of his designs'

(II Cor. 2:11) then we may perish with him, or at least sustain great damage.

The Person and Work of Satan

God's ultimate intention is to 'unite all things in [Christ]' (Eph. 1:9–10). Satan's intention is to disunite them as they have been created by God, i.e. to 'divide and rule'. He seeks to have the whole creation worship him instead of God, and so to unite them by this kind of worship.

It is not possible to describe the *person* of Satan on the one hand and his *work* on the other. As with Christ, so with Satan: the person and work cannot be divided. As we proceed with our examination of Satan we will see this to be the case.

'That Ancient Serpent the Devil'

There is a description in Revelation 12:9, 'And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'. This verse tells us that the great red dragon of the Revelation is none other than the devil, and is the 'ancient serpent', i.e. the one of old which tempted the primal couple in Eden. It also tells us that the dragon (the serpent, the devil) is highly deceptive.

In Genesis 3:1 we read, 'Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord had made'. Some see this story in Genesis 3:1–15 as being mythical or allegorical. Even so, they must read the significance of 'serpent' and 'subtle' as both these ideas

are used widely in Scripture.

The word *subtle* (Heb: *arum*) has the connotation of 'crafty'. It is used by Saul against David in I Samuel 23:22 where he describes him as 'very cunning'. We deduce, then, that although created perfectly by God, somewhere between the time of his creation and his interview with the first woman, the serpent has moved from guilelessness to craftiness. This would seem to give some substance to the account in Ezekiel 28 where the beautiful creature of God becomes corrupted by his own beauty, and so emerges as 'cunning' and 'crafty'.

The Guile of the Serpent and the Fall of Man

Man is the creature of all creatures who is next to God. God created him in His own likeness and image, and he alone—of all creatures—is in the image of God. God's plan for man is ultimate glory (Gen. 1:26; Ps. 8:5–8; I Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:11–14; Rom. 8:17–29; Phil. 3:21). Man will judge celestial creatures (I Cor. 6:3). In order to get at God, and to further his own plans, Satan must attack man, and especially strike at his affinity with God. Genesis 3:1–10 gives a clear account of this.

The serpent questioned God's command, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat of any tree of the garden"?' A restriction is implied, and it is hinted that this restriction is unjust. When the woman replied that God permitted them to eat of every tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because to eat of it would be lethal, the serpent said plainly, 'You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be *like* God, knowing good and evil'. Since they

were already *like* God there could be no temptation to achieve that likeness. What they lacked in such likeness was the personal ability to know good and evil as God did. So the temptation was really to be *as* God, and not merely *like* Him.

The woman listened to the voice of the serpent rather than the voice of God. The man listened to the words of his wife rather than the word of God, and both were subverted. Far from feeling free they felt themselves exposed, and tried to cover and even hide themselves from God. Guilt had entered in, and with it the power of evil over them since the power of evil over man lies in man's guilt. That is why the apostle John later said, 'The whole world is in the power of the evil one' (I John 5:19). He did not mean the whole created world was under Satan, but that portion of mankind which has been drawn into Satan's system by its guilt, and its alienation from God.

The New Gods

Ontologically there is only one God—the Father (I Cor. 8:5–6). Satan is called 'the god of this world', i.e. the god of his own kingdom. The idols are also called 'gods'. Somewhere Satan moved to establish his own godhead. He enticed man into doing the same. In Genesis 3:4 the serpent promises the woman that she and her man will be *as* God, knowing good and evil. The phrase 'as God' can be translated 'as gods', and this was the idea. Each was to be a god with independent ability to know good and evil.

'Knowing good and evil' is an interesting statement. It is

clear that fallen sinful man cannot know truly what is *good* and what is *evil*. The matter generally works out as 'what is good *for me*, and what is evil *for me*'. The true knowledge of these things is only for those who are pure in heart (Titus 1:15). Nevertheless, the woman and man were now each committed to the principle of autonomy. From that point onwards members of the human race have argued vociferously as to what is 'good' and what is 'evil'. The woman argues with the man, the man with the woman. Each is convinced of being right. Conflict is inevitable. The human race has—for the most part—'daggers drawn'. There can be no freedom in the human race until only one knowledge of good and evil exists, and that knowledge be from God.

The Elements of the Curse

The serpent is first to be cursed. Of all the creatures he is cursed. He is to 'eat dust' and the symbolism of that is easy to understand. The term 'upon your belly' needs no interpretation. The prophecy of the serpent's defeat is also part of that curse—'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel'.

The woman is to have pain in childbirth, and to be ruled by her husband, even though she wishes to rule him—as a goddess!

The Two Families

One of the immediate fruits of the Fall was the divided family of the man and the woman. Cain and Abel were

essentially at odds each with the other. The apostle John saw clearly that one family was under God, and the other under ‘the evil one’. In his first letter (3:10–12) he said, ‘By this it may be seen who are the children of God and who are the children of the devil; whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother. For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous’.

Jesus confirmed the matter of the two families—one God’s and the other the devil’s—when he spoke to the Jews who were constantly refusing to accept him and his teaching. He said, ‘You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him’ (John 8:44). Jesus was well-acquainted with the whole matter of the fall of man, Satan’s deceit and his delivering up of the first couple to death by the use of deceit in the absence of the truth.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Action of Satan in History—II

Satan Builds His System, the Celestial System

It must be admitted that what we are writing is at first sight bizarre and fantastic. Those who are acquainted with the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha will know that it is a different world from that of the Canon of Scripture, but it does provide an excellent background to the materials of the biblical Canon. Even in the Canon the system of evil seems at first sight to be reasonably mild.

It is only when we put the materials together that a fascinating and frightening system appears.

The Principalities and Powers

The System Commences

It is difficult to know where to ‘cut and paste’ from the text of Scripture so as to put together the system which is headed up by the devil. One place is the 12th chapter of the Revelation where the great red dragon (the devil) sweeps down to the earth a third of the stars of heaven with his tail. In apocalyptic (revelational) language ‘the stars of heaven’ are angels. Satan then has a third of the angels coerced into his system. The reader should read the whole text of Revelation 12, but relevant parts are here quoted:

And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth . . . Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they were defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

One of our problems where language is apocalyptic is to obtain a sequence in time, since apocalyptic does not

have a precise regard as to time. Was this rebellion in Revelation chapter 12 *generally* that which happened prior to the creation of man? We do not know. What we read is that at one point *in particular*, the dragon cast down a third of the stars (i.e. angels) to the earth. In the passage we are discussing, it is possible that the dragon already had these angels in his following *in* heaven and that they were swept down to the earth following the victory of Christ, in which case they were cast down with the dragon following their defeat by Michael and his angels; otherwise there were two castings down of the dragon’s angels, i.e. in verses 4 and 9. The main point is that the dragon had power over certain of the angels.

Some scholars believe there were three courses of angels, each course being under its appropriate archangels, these archangels—it is conjectured—being three, namely Gabriel, Michael and Lucifer. This can only be conjecture, but since the angels are numbered as ‘myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands’, then the angels under Satan are numerous.

The Angelic Orders *

In the New Testament, some of these angels—if not all—are called by various names, such as ‘principalities, rulers, thrones and dominions’ and each name is doubt-less significant, even if we cannot always determine that significance. The following references are made to them:

For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether *thrones* or *dominions* or *principalities* or *authorities*—all things were created through him and for him (Col. 1:16).

None of the *rulers* of this age understood this [glorification]; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (I Cor. 2:8).

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following *the prince of the power of the air*, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:1–2).¹

He disarmed *the principalities and powers* and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it (Col. 2:15).

For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against *the principalities*, against *the powers*, against *the world rulers* of this present darkness, against *the spiritual hosts of wickedness* in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:12).

. . . which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in heavenly places, far above all *rule* and *authority* and *power* and *dominion*, and above *every name* that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come (Eph. 1:20–21).

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor *angels*, nor *principalities*, nor things present, nor things to come, nor *powers*, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38–39).

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every *rule* and every *authority* and *power*. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet (I Cor. 15:24–25).

God's Planned Creational Order

It is evident from various Scriptures, including the above references, that God has invested certain—if not all—the angelic powers with certain authority and responsibility. It would appear that such powers act functionally within God's creation. There are kingdoms, principalities and such ruled over by celestial intelligences. For example in Deuteronomy 32:8–9 we read, 'When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the people according to the number of *the sons of God*. For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage'.

Because some manuscripts have *the sons of Israel* for *the sons of God*, it is thought by some that it is a reference to the division of Canaan to Israel, but if *the sons of God* means *the angels*—as is often the case—then it means that principalities and authorities are kingdoms or nations of men, i.e. different peoples have appointed angelic powers which concern them. This would comport with Paul's statement in Acts 17:26, 'And he [God] made from one [man: Adam] every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, *having determined allotted periods and the boundaries* of their habitation'.

Further proof comes from Daniel chapters 11 and 12 which the reader ought to examine thoroughly. Briefly, the story is that Daniel desired to understand a vision given to him. For three weeks he fasted, and it seems, also prayed. Eventually a powerful angel appeared to him because of the fasting and prayer. He announced

¹ Note: The New English Bible translates 'the commander of the *spiritual powers* of the air'.

that he would have arrived sooner, but ‘The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, so I left him there with the prince of the kingdom of Persia and came to make you understand what is to befall your people in the latter days. For the vision is for the days to come . . . But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I am through with him, lo the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of the truth: there is none who contends by my side against those except Michael, your prince’ (Dan. 10: 13–14, 20–21).

Jacob, Israel and the Angels

The vision Jacob had at Bethel was of angels ascending and descending upon a great staircase. Later Jewish thinking interpreted this as Jacob watching the rise and fall of peoples or nations. Seeing no angel of his own people he was told—so the tradition goes—that God heartened him by saying that He—God—was the Angel of Israel, and this is the point brought out in Deuteronomy 32:9, ‘For the Lord’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage’. It also makes sense of the many references to the care of Israel by the Angel of the Lord. The Angel of the Lord is almost God Himself, and at least a theophany of Yahweh. This is the Angel that attended Israel in the wilderness, ‘the angel of his presence saved them’ (Isa. 63:9), and was probably the one at Sinai through whom the law was given (cf. Acts 7:35, 38; Gal. 3:19–20).

Jesus and the Angels

At this point we will not make much reference to Messiah and the angels for it is quite a subject in itself, but refer to John 1:43–51. In this section Jesus talked with Nathaniel who was astounded by what Jesus had said to him and exclaimed, ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel’. To this Jesus replied, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man’.

It is possible Jesus was referring to Daniel 7:9ff., but certainly he was primarily referring to Jacob’s vision. He—Jesus—was the stairway, the means by which the angels ascended and descended, i.e. the rise and fall of nations was wholly dependent upon him. This is con-firmed by Pauline teaching such as in Ephesians 1:19–21 that Jesus and not Lucifer was to be raised above all the ‘stars of God’, i.e. all the principalities and powers. He was to be Lord of all the nations!

Rebellious Angelic Powers

We have seen in Revelation chapter 12 that one third of the celestial powers were coerced by Satan to be under him—the great red dragon! It is almost certain to these that the writers of II Peter and Jude refer. In II Peter 2:4 we read, ‘. . . God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell [Tartarus] and committed them to pits of nether gloom to be kept until the judgement’. Jude 6 has it, ‘And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been

kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgement of the great day'. 'They sinned' of the Petrine writings and 'left their proper dwelling' of Jude are the same. The angels sinned by not fulfilling the tasks God had given them.

Some scholars see this as meaning that these fallen and disobedient angels could well be the evil princes of the nations, fighting in ungodly ways against the godly celestial powers. In such fighting the nations have a chequered career, here rising and there falling. They also see that Psalm 2 which is a great Messianic Psalm when portraying the kings and peoples of the nations setting themselves against God, is simply portraying what evil powers are always seeking to do, i.e. pitting man against God, inciting him to great rebellion.

This Psalm, of course, shows the nations being defeated by the Son of God—the true Messiah—for the Father says to him, 'Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession'.

The Place and Power of Angels—a Conclusion

We can conclude this section by summarizing that celestial powers were created by God and commissioned to undertake certain essential functional authority and responsibility. Were such powers to be obedient to God then all things would function truly, i.e. ontologically. The rebellion of such powers, however, and their co-operation with Satan—i.e. Lucifer—seemed to encourage

that one to think that one day he could take the whole world and receive its worship.

*** *The Good Angels and Their Work***

That angels have to do with humans is certainly set out in Scripture. On what we might call 'the good side' angels are shown as follows:

The Hebrew word simply means 'messenger' or 'envoy'. So too, does the Greek word. The messenger is the one who is in the celestial sphere and so in the presence of God. This is why he can be sent as an envoy of God . . . The meanings of words are often discovered from contexts and synonymous uses. Hence the term 'sons of God' (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Ps. 29:1; 89:6) indicating a special relationship with God. Psalm 89:5–7 calls them 'the holy ones', 'sons of God', 'the council', and then in verse 8 calls the Creator 'the Lord God of hosts' which seems to fit with verse 5, 'the assembly of the holy ones'. Psalm 82:1 says, 'God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods [Heb.: *elohim*] he holds judgement'. Matthew 24:36 speaks of 'the angels of heaven', and Luke 2:13 as 'the heavenly host'. Psalm 8:5 speaks of man as being made a little lower than the Elohim, which can mean either God (cf. RSV) or the angels (cf. Heb. 2:7). In Daniel 4:13, 17 and 23 angels are called 'watchers' and in Daniel 10:13, 20 and 21 they are called 'princes'. In Psalm 103:20–21 they are called 'ministers' or 'servants' (cf. Heb. 1:14) for they minister both to God and man (G. Bingham, *What's All This About Angels?* p. 2, NCPI, 1982).

The book just quoted records the numerous occasions in which the destinies of men and of nations have been greatly affected and effected by the ministry of angels. To quote only a few we mention angelic encounters with Abraham, Hagar, Lot, Eliezer, Jacob, Moses, Israel, Balaam, Joshua, the various Judges, Samson's parents,

Gideon's parents, Elijah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Amos, Zechariah, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, Mary Magdalene, Peter, the apostles, Philip, Cornelius, Paul and John the Seer.

In the Book of the Revelation angels have much to do with the course of history. There is no section of Scripture which is so prolific in recording the nature and actions of angels, most—if not all—of which are good angels. They are busy in defeating the opposition of evil powers, nations and men.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Action of Satan in History—III

Satan's World System

Forming a System

There can ever only be one true system, i.e the true creational order as made by God. No other system of true value can be devised and made to become essentially a properly functional system. A number of factors go to show this. God's affirmation of His own creation, 'It is

very good' (Gen. 1:31) shows that His creation is functional in every degree, and unique. Time and again God asks the question, 'Who is a god like unto me, and to whom shall you liken me?'. By this He means He is ineffable. Nothing exists by which we can start to know Him. Because sinful man has 'exchanged the truth for a lie', he further distances himself from the Creator who made him.

Any system that man would devise must come out of his so-called human wisdom. Whilst he may—and does—accumulate vast stores of knowledge, he is limited in his ability to apply such knowledge. Wisdom may utilize knowledge but it has to be more than knowledge itself. There is a noetic knowledge, and there is a relational knowledge. Man is both affective (feeling) and cognitive (knowing by thought) and both these elements relate to his will. He can will to know or not to know, to be wise or to be foolish. Because he is limited by many factors he cannot oversee and organize all elements. Hence, his system must be limited in its nature and will always be deficient and faulty.

The biblical statement about man is that though he was wise in his primal state of guilelessness and innocence, he lost that wisdom, and his mind was darkened. Though still able to reason well, his reason came to have a self-bias, and his knowledge of good and evil to be related to his own self-regulation and extension.

Anthropology tells us of many systems which man devises in his religions, philosophies and ideologies. It would be strange if they were not many and varied. The writer of Ecclesiastes put it neatly, saying, 'Behold, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have

sought out many devices' (7:29. The Jerusalem Bible translates it, 'I find that God made man simple: man's complex problems are of his own devising').

Satan's Devised System

A thoughtful reader of the Scriptures will realize that man is limited because of what we call his 'finiteness'. Man at best is a man, and is no god. Because he essentially needs a god he devises one. He attributes a certain supernaturality to it. Only God is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-present. There are, however, celestial creatures who appear to have power beyond ours. Man trusts that his gods are this way. They are the only useful alternative to God.

Even so, the angels are limited. They too are creatures, and although they appear to exist without ageing, and although they appear to have powers beyond that of mortal men, yet they can do no more than God chooses to allow. Men in their desire for experiences of awe have worshipped angels through the millenniums and trusted that these celestial creatures would do them good!

No Escape from the Ontological

Satan has devised and built a system, with great thought and care. When we look at it closely we see that it is very much a copy of what God has created. The Kingdom of God has been created: the kingdom of Satan has been devised. God is the true Father: Satan devises a fatherhood. God has His family and Satan his. Later we

will see that just as God is triune, so Satan—dragon, beast and false prophet—has a trifold godhead. God has His word, and Satan has his. God is prophetic, having His own plan in mind, revealing it, His prophets being both predictive and hortatory. Satan, too, has his forms of the prophetic in divination, soothsaying, necromancy and the like: he has his false prophets. God is the God of creation, redemption and the final unification and renewal of all things. Satan poses as a creator, as a redeemer, and promises a good climax to history. As God demands true worship for the good of His creatures so Satan demands worship of himself by his world system. God has His law, and Satan his. God promises love, joy and peace in genuine spirituality, and through His gifts within the natural course of living. Satan offers more glittering and stimulating gifts.

So we could go on. If, however, we study the two kingdoms, i.e. the one of God and the other of Satan, we discover something quite remarkable. Satan has no originality! He is bound to copy, bound to attempt a duplication of what is essentially so, i.e. the ontological. By nature of the case what Satan does is unontological, anti-ontological, and—so Satan trusts—is finally ante-ontological. By all this we mean that Satan opposes God's system seeking to demean it, whilst at the same time he builds a better system! He vandalizes and exploits God's system but can create nothing better. In fact he cannot create anything for he—along with all other creatures—cannot *create*. He can only *devise*. This is by nature of the case. He can, however, oppose what is created, and his best opposition of all that is God's is to make such a kingdom as to supersede it.

The Compulsion to be Ontological

The fascinating fact is that he must work along onto-logical lines in order to be functional. This is the way things are. There is nothing outside or beyond the on-tological, so that in one sense he must stay within the ontological. Thus what he devises has to be a father-hood, a family, a kingdom, a tri-fold godhead, a 'creative word', a 'prophetic' ministry—and so on—that is a copy or an artificial cloning of the true. Someone—I think it was C. S. Lewis—has called Satan 'God's ape'; and so he is. Some have called what Satan devises 'a copy', others 'a counterfeit', and yet others 'a counterpart'. It is all of these things, but also it is an intended substitute. It poses as the real thing, not merely a substitute but a going one better than the original!

For us this insight is valuable. We see nothing can work effectively except along ontological lines. Since Satan's system cannot be *essentially* ontological, it is doomed to failure. Whilst it gives indications of satisfaction, it can never give essential satisfaction and fulfilment. It is a hollow kingdom, an artificial replica, a doomed idiocy that having played its game falls apart in dreary and dreadful fission! Paul says, 'The fashion of this world changes', and John, 'The world is passing away'. At the end not a trace of all that is evil will be evident. All evil self-destructs by reason of its own nature. Seen from another point of view it is destroyed by God.

CHAPTER NINE

The Action of Satan in History—IV

The Structure of Satan's World System

The World System Itself

Galatians 1:4 speaks of 'the present evil age'. The Greek word used here—*aeon*—can mean a time, a period, and a system. In Ephesians 1:21 Paul speaks of 'this age' and 'the age to come'. The present age has evil in it, but the age to come will be pure. Even so, Satan is not head of this present age—for God is King of all the ages—but he

is head of a system within it which can be called an 'age' or a 'world'.

John enjoins his readers, 'Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love *for* [or, *of*] the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he that does the will of God abides for ever' (I John 2:15–17). Whilst John may be warning against idolatry of created things, he is referring to a system which has its lusts and is evil. He is not referring purely to the created world.

Both in his Letters and his Gospel, John uses the term 'world' and the Greek word for it is *kosmos*. It is really the equivalent of *aeon*, for in I Corinthians 1:20 Paul asks, 'Where is the debater of this age? [*aeon*]. Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? [*kosmos*]'.

The world (*aeon, kosmos*) is an evil system headed by Satan who rules evil powers and fallen man, and it exists within the true created order of God, utilizing all possible resources to outmode and supersede God's eternal (onto-logical) structure. We must then examine it thoroughly in order to understand its elements so that we can remain free from it, and yet fight against it and defeat it as God's elect 'sons of the kingdom'.

The Powers of This World System

We have seen that Satan has drawn down from heaven a vast number of angelic creatures called principalities, powers, authorities and rulers. These are 'the world'

rulers of this present darkness . . . the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Eph. 6:12). These forces use their power under 'the prince of this world' as Jesus called him (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), or 'the god of this world' as Paul called him (II Cor. 4:4). Jesus in Matthew 25:41 spoke of 'the devil and his angels', thus showing the oneness in action of Satan and his hosts.

In chapter 7 we saw that these principalities and powers have been given certain authority over nations, and as such rule them. God's good principalities and powers rule well. Indeed it seems they oppose the operations of evil angels (cf. Dan. chs 10 and 11). In the ultimate, the rise and fall of nations depends primarily upon God, but in the present, evil often succeeds. That is why some nations come to ascendancy in the world and then lose their positions of power. History—rightly understood—is the clash of two kingdoms, that of God's kingdom and the kingdom of Satan.

The Principalities and Mankind

Paul said clearly that we wrestle against principalities and powers (Eph. 6:12). That means that these powers have to do with human beings—the whole human race. Their actions are linked with the destinies of persons as well as the whole race. In animistic tribes of people, i.e. those who are aware of and who worship spirits, a sense of the supernatural is present. This could be mere superstition, but it could also be awareness of the supranatural beings that exist. Modern Western rationalism scorns such ideas, but it seems that such rationalism does not satisfy the clever sophisticated West which is now

reverting to what it calls 'the parasensory world'.

When Jesus spoke of 'the devil and his angels' (Matt. 25:41) we are given the impression that Satan and his hosts work in concert. In the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:3–9, 18–23) the seed sown on hard ground is snatched away by the birds. Jesus explains that it is the evil one who snatches the seed, so that doubtless the birds of the air are the evil angels. They work on man-kind, taking the word of God from their hearts. In the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–42), tare seed is sown amongst the wheat, and doubtless the devil—who is accused of this—uses his angels to do so.

The Power of Evil Principalities Over Man

When we ask what hold do evil powers have over man then the answer is that it is the same as the devil has over man. In Hebrews 2:14–15 we read, 'Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage'. In this passage the devil has the *power of death* which is *man's fear of death*. Fear of death is really fear of what lies beyond death, i.e. the judgement. This can be seen from comparing Romans 5:12–21, I John 4:16–18, and Hebrews 9:27. The simple way of putting it is to say that man fears death because of his own guilt of sin.

Satan does not have the authority of death (Greek: *exousia*), nor its power (Greek: *dunamis*), but its might

(Greek: *kratos*). That is, when man is guilty he fears death because he deserves to die, and Satan and the evil powers use accusatory devices to keep man in terror. Human guilt, as we have seen, keeps fallen man in the present evil *aeon* or world (I John 5:19). We know that Satan is the accuser, and we also know that accusation is one of the most painful things that human beings suffer.

Confirmatory to the powers using human guilt to keep man in bondage, see Colossians 2:13–15. Here Paul said, ‘And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven all your trespasses, *having cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands*; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him’. Paul was saying that the guilt of the law—i.e. the guilt which came from their trespasses—was cancelled at the Cross. Free from guilt, they were free from the powers. Indeed the powers were put to shame, having been totally disarmed and made helpless. The key to man’s bondage is his guilt, and *guilt is the powerful weapon which all evil uses against man*.

Satan, the Evil Powers and the Law, Death, Wrath, the Curse, Conscience and Judgement

We come now to the heart of the power of the evil world system. If man had not sinned, the evil celestial powers could not get him into their grip. Had there been no law there would have been no transgression (Rom. 4:15). Had there been no law

there would have been no wrath of God for ‘the law brings wrath’ (Rom. 4:15). This means there would have been no curse, for ‘all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them” ’ (Gal. 3:10).

Had there been no law then there would have been no death, not anyway as we know the death that has come through transgression (Rom. 5:12f.). The sting of death is sin, and the power (*dunamis*) of sin is (the guilt of) the law (I Cor. 15:55–56). The conscience is troubled by a person’s sin (guilt) so that he may have a defiled con-science, an evil conscience, and a seared conscience (Heb. 9:14; 10:2, 22; I Tim. 4:2). To be in this state is to be under the power of evil. It is to fear death, wrath, and the coming judgement. ‘There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked’ (Isa. 57:21).

The Demonic Powers of the World System

When we come to the ‘origin’ and nature of demons we find it difficult to be wholly clear in regard to them. That demons exist is certainly set out in Scripture. Whether they are fallen angels is not easy to determine, although that is generally accepted to be the case. On the one hand Jesus speaks of ‘the devil and his angels’ (Matt. 25:41), and at the same time accepts the current thought of demons being under a leader, i.e. ‘Beelzebul, the prince

of demons' (Luke 11:15). Are these the one?

Some writers see demons as the result of the cohabitation of fallen angels with human women. This idea is taken from Genesis 6:1–4, 'When men began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose . . . The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men that were of old, the men of renown'. It is claimed that the sons of God were angels, and that they must have had the power of sex and pro-creation. Their offspring then were curious creatures, and on death became spirits or demons.

It is possible that such was the case, but difficulties abound. Do angels who 'neither marry nor give in marriage' cohabit with human beings? If then, why not now? Would the progeny of this curious union further cohabit within the human race, so that today there would be multiplication of such creatures, or would they be 'hybrids', unable to further cohabit?

The alternative to this interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 is that 'the sons of God' were the descendants of Seth and Enosh—those called on the name of the Lord, and so worshipped him (Gen. 4:25–26)—and the 'daughters of men' were the female progeny of Cain who had gone out from the presence of the Lord (Gen. 4:16). The union of the godly line, and the line of Cain certainly would have caused the growing corruption and the Flood was the judgement. To me it seems the latter is the more probable explanation of this passage. Whatever the interpretation

we cannot be dogmatic about the 'origins' of demons.

If the general claim that demons are fallen celestial powers were correct, then what could be explored is the variety of celestial beings such as 'living creatures', 'cherubim', 'seraphim', 'archangels', 'powerful angels' and, generally, 'angels'. We certainly know little about them. We have referred to II Peter 2:4 where the rebellious angels are kept in chains in Tartarus and in I Peter 3:19 these may be those called 'the spirits which are in prison'. 'Kept in chains' would not necessarily be literal, and it may mean that such 'spirits' are kept under surveillance and cannot go beyond certain limits in their operations. If so, these spirits—fallen angels—may well be what are known as demons, and Revelation chapter 9 may confirm this fact.

The Reality and Operations of Demons in the Old Testament

The Old Testament makes little reference to demonic forces, and almost no reference to angels which are evil. It does, however, have vast reference to idols, and some indication that idols and evil powers are linked.²

² R. K. Harrison in his article 'Demon, Demonic, Demonology', *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 2 (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, U.S.A., 1977), pp. 92–101, seems to demolish almost every Old Testament reference generally used by writers to establish demonology in the Old Testament, so that there are scarcely any grounds for claiming demonic activity. He may well be right, but Paul's reference in I Cor. 10:20 does seem to link with Deut. 32:17, Lev. 17:7 and Ps. 106:37, and become a commentary on their statements in spite of Harrison's partial attempt to demythologize the demons.

In Psalm 106:36–37 the writer says, ‘They served their [Canaanite] idols which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and daughters *to the demons*’. Exodus 22:20 warned, ‘Whoever sacrifices to any god, save to the Lord only, shall be utterly destroyed’. Leviticus 17:7 comments, ‘So they shall no more slay their sacrifices *for satyrs*, after whom they play the harlot’. Deuteronomy 32:17 records, ‘They sacrificed *to demons* which were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods which had come in of late, whom your fathers had never dreaded’.

The term *demons* (Heb: *shedhim*) differs from the term *satyr* (Heb: *seirim*). The former is found in Psalm 106:36–37 and Deuteronomy 32:17. The latter—*satyrs*—is found in Exodus 22:20, II Chronicles 11:15, Isaiah 13:21, and 34:14. *Satyrs* can be ‘hairy ones’ or ‘goats’ and may be literal. On the other hand they may represent images and the reality of demons.

If we take Paul’s comment of I Corinthians 10:20–21 at face value, i.e. ‘I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons’, then we must conclude that all idolatry is linked with demons.

The Reality and Operations of Demons in the New Testament

The scene seems to change in the New Testament. The synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) have many

references to demons. One curious feature is that there seemed to be no idols around in Jesus’ time, nor were sacrifices made to demons. Yet in the face of absence of idols, numerous demons or unclean spirits abound. This has been put down to the fact that Jesus had arrived as Messiah, and was being opposed by the powers of evil. Others do not quite see it this way: they think that the Kingdom was—by nature of its essential being—ferreting out all evil forces. They—the demons—came out in spite of themselves! This later seems to have been the case at Samaria under the ministry of Philip the evangelist (Acts 8:7). Peter told Cornelius and his household that Jesus was ‘*healing* all those oppressed by the devil’, and that would include demons and their sickness-manifestations.

The Lord may have given the explanation himself in his story about the man who had a demon in his heart but the demon having gone out (how he went out we do not know), the man cleansed his heart, only to have the demon return to the swept heart bringing seven demons ‘worse than the first’ (Luke 11:24–26). Some see our Lord saying to Israel, ‘Yes, you have purged yourselves of idols, but you have worse demons than you had in your old state. You are sevenfold worse than you were. I have come to liberate the nation from the Strong Man. I am stronger than the Strong Man’. Certainly Stephen in his address before the Sanhedrin confronted them with Israel’s incorrigible idolatry.

Demons in the Gospels

Many folk have an almost morbid interest in the matters of demons and the occult. What worries some is that

seemingly God does not control all illness. It is as though Satan has the power to inflict illness. Indeed some make the statement that all sickness comes from Satan, because they cannot believe God would visit anyone with illness. They ought to be realistic and read Deuteronomy chapter 28. We must believe that God has the power to wound and to heal (Deut. 32:39; I Sam. 2:6; II Kings 5:7; Exod. 4:11; Isa. 45:7; 31:2. See my *The Wounding and the Healing* [NCPI, 1982]).

At the same time people expose themselves to evil, giving an entrance to the devil, and certainly—within limits—he is allowed to inflict sickness. Hence Peter speaks of Jesus ‘healing all those who were oppressed of the devil’. Demons (or as Luke calls them ‘unclean spirits’) are under a prince called Beelzebul. In the Gospels demons caused the following in their victims: nakedness (Luke 8:27); blindness and dumbness (Matt. 12:22); suicidal tendencies (Mark 5:5); casting down (Mark 9:17f.); and homicidal tendencies (Matt. 8:28). The terms ‘unclean spirits’, ‘demons’ and ‘devils’ are some-times used interchangeably in the Gospels.

Jesus healed people of demonically inspired illnesses. In Luke 13:11 we read of a woman who had a spirit of sickness. Jesus healed her, saying that she had been bound of Satan for eighteen years. We must note that not all sickness was demonic, for we read in Matthew 4:24 of ‘sick people’, i.e. ‘those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics’. Notice also that Jesus delegated the powers of exorcism, on occasions, to his disciples (Luke 9:1—to the 12 disciples; and Luke 10:1–12, 17–20—to the 70 disciples), and it could be argued from Luke 9:1–2 that demons and

diseases are linked, i.e. that sicknesses were demonically originated. Jesus seemed saddened when they could not cast out the demon of the only child of a certain father (Luke 9:37–43).

What we need to note is that when Jesus healed or exorcized demons, he rarely called for repentance in a personal way, although undoubtedly his original call, ‘Repent and be baptized’, had referred to the coming of the Kingdom. Even so, he healed people in large numbers, and did not use his healings as a means of attracting people or even demanding repentance so that his healings and exorcisms would be effective. His statement to the man healed by the pool of Bethzatha (John 5:1–15), ‘Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you’ was a warning he rarely gave, and he may have had a particular reason relating to the case of the healed person.

Demons in the Acts, Epistles and the Revelation

There is not a lot of reference to demons and spirits in these Books of the New Testament. In Acts 5:16 there is first mention of healing ‘those afflicted with unclean spirits’. It may well be that the signs and wonders mentioned at various times include exorcisms. In Acts 8 Philip casts out demons: indeed they ‘came out . . . crying with a loud voice’. The next mention of the demonic is in relation to the girl who has ‘a spirit of divination’ which Paul casts out of her (Acts 16:16–18). Whilst Acts 19:8–20 must have had much to do with the exorcism of demons, yet demons are only mentioned in

relation to the seven sons of Sceva who were using Jesus' name to cast out spirits.

In the Epistles we have the mention of the link between idols and demons (I Cor. 10:20f.), and possibly this idea is carried through in I Corinthians 12:3. Probably Ephesians 2:2 refers also to Satan's power over forces which serve him. Certainly Ephesians 6:12 refers to fallen angelic powers, and I Timothy 4:1–3 talks about the activity of demons being on the increase in the last days. Paul in I Corinthians 12:10 speaks of the gift of discerning spirits, i.e. whether they be good or bad, and I John 4:1 (cf. I John 2:18f.) calls for discernment of false prophets and anti-Christ's who will proliferate. These could be either 'spirits' who are men or who are demons.

The 9th chapter of the Revelation speaks of an invasion in the world of powers from the abyss—the bottomless pit—which seem to be demonic in nature. In Revelation 16:13 'three foul spirits like frogs' are mentioned, and 18:2 states that fallen Babylon has 'become a dwelling place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit, a haunt of every foul and hateful bird', and whilst this may simply mean Babylon has become desolate (cf. Jer. 50:39), it also indicates the desolation in which demonic spirits reside.

Outstanding cases of demon possession are those of the Syrophenician's daughter (Matt. 15:22; Mark 7:25), the Gerasene demoniac (Matt. 8:28; Mark 5:2; Luke 8:27), the Capernaum madman (Mark 1:23; Luke 4:33), the blind and dumb demoniac (Matt. 12:22; Luke 11:14), and the girl who had a spirit of divination (Acts 16:16).

Human Responsibility in Being Seized or Oppressed by Demons

It has been debated whether a person is morally responsible for having a demonic invasion, oppression, or sickness. Paul certainly says that by wrong anger we can give a place to the devil, i.e. some kind of an en-trance (Eph. 4:26–27). Again where there is the kind of rebellion that Cain had, one belongs to the family of the evil one (I John 3:10–11). In addition Paul indicates in Colossians 1:13 that prior to salvation men and women are under the powers of darkness. God translates them into the Kingdom of the Son of His love through the forgiveness of sins. What must be kept in mind all the time is the hatred Satan and his minions have for the human race. They seek on every score to defame and vandalize it. Such vandalism is a form of mockery aimed at the impeccable Creator.

What is clear from the New Testament is that Jesus healed many of sickness, disease and demonic oppression, and did this without necessarily asking for repentance and faith from the oppressed. He simply said, 'If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you' (Matt. 12:28). Likewise his disciples healed folk and said to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'. This we shall later examine in more detail.

In summing up the matter of fallen angels, and/or demonic creatures, we can realize that until we see the goals of evil, we will not understand the modes of that evil. Mere meticulous attention to details of the evil system may simply spring from curiosity and be to no purpose.

In any case such an approach is atomistic and misses the fact of the fierce battle that is being fought as history moves towards the 'great and notable day of the Lord'.

CHAPTER TEN

*The Action of Satan in
History—V*

Satan and the Occult

Satan's Organization of His Forces

In one way we are ahead of ourselves. We ought first to see what is the plan and goal of God in history so that we can understand Satan's apeing of it. If stated simply that God's plan is the irreversible triumph of His Kingdom,

the defeat of all evil, and the regeneration of all things so that there is a new heaven and a new earth in which only righteousness obtains, then that will be enough for us at present.

We have seen that Satan desires to do as well as, if not better than, God. Whilst this is impossible by nature of the case, he persists in the irrationality of pride and anger. On the one hand he seeks to destroy everything that God has created, and on the other to build up something as good, if not better. To do this Satan must organize his vast kingdom of fallen angelic beings, captured spirits which are supernatural and natural, as well as maintain the hoax that he is all-powerful, all-present, and all-knowing. Through these he can do his work of deception, seduction, and threatening coercion.

What we need to keep in mind all the time is that Satan can only work along ontological lines, for it is in them that the functional power obtains. Hence, the whole system of the occult must parallel the ontological, i.e. the essential reality. This study does not go into detail as to the occult for that is a vast field. It does, however, take up some of the elements indicated in the Scriptures.

The Occult and Its Action

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines the occult as 'hidden; concealed; secret; communicated only to the initiated; not apprehensible by the mind; recondite; of the nature of or pertaining to those sciences involving the

knowledge or use of the supernatural (as magic, alchemy, astrology, theosophy, and the like)'. This is amusing to an age of rationalism, but rationalism is not satisfying so that even those who scoff at superstition find themselves attracted to the mystical and mysterious, and the idea that special knowledge may be to one's great advantage fascinates even the (so-called) scientific mind.

Moses knew the minds of his people and warned them, 'The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law' (Deut. 29:29). Israel was a privileged people, having a unique revelation of God and a law which was unique among the nations (Deut. 4:5-14; Rom. 9:4). They could, if they would, know God, and all they needed to know for true human living. Also what they knew was in order to use it and obey the law—i.e. 'that we may do all the words of this law'. It was not mere noetic knowledge.

The Origins of the Occult

This we do not rightly know. We know that Cain went his own way and built his own cities, and doubtless his own kind of worship. Following the flood men sought independence from God, making kingdoms, seeking to assault even heaven until the human monopolistic system was shattered by the judgement of varied tongues. It seems clear that the new peoples were generally idolaters. Joshua 24:2 indicates that Abraham (Abram) and his ancestors were idolaters. The occult, therefore, has its beginnings in hidden antiquity. Archaeology has helped us to trace various sources of the occult, but its elements

are many and varied. Joshua referred to ‘the gods which your fathers served beyond the River, and in Egypt’, as also ‘the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell’. The three sources then were the gods of Ur of the Chaldees, of Egypt and of Canaan. With the idols also went elements of the occult.

Magic and the Occult in the Old Testament

In history magic has been divided into two elements, namely white and black magic. White magic was and is supposed to be based on benevolent powers who exist, and by whom good ends can be gained, and the evil planned by black magic be cancelled or undone. Black magic is based on the fact of malevolent powers which or who can be used to invoke curses and spells on one’s enemies, bringing about calamity. What we need to see is what elements of magic and the occult are means used by the kingdom of darkness to deceive or seduce or threaten mankind and to forward Satan’s aims.

God Alone Leads and Aids His People

The classic passage in regard to the occult is Deuteronomy 18:9–14, and should be studied thoroughly, ‘When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination, a sooth-sayer,

or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord; and because of these abominable practices the Lord your God is driving them [the Canaanites] out before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God. For these nations which you are about to dispossess, give heed to sooth-sayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do so’.

Before interpreting this passage the following section should be read, i.e. Deuteronomy 18:15–22. Here rich teaching is given on the nature of true prophecy, and it is intended to teach that there is no need for an Israelite or person of God to apply to any other source for true prophecy. Since man is to live by every word which proceeds out of the mouth of God, and not by human words, wisdom or devices, so every man will be informed by God. A later prophet cried, ‘Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does evil befall a city unless the Lord has done it? Surely the Lord does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?’ (Amos 3:6–8).

Through all its history the prophetic word was to inform the people, but forms of magic had in mind to find out the future apart from God, and—even more—if possible to influence it. Underneath this was trust only in the gods, or distrust and dislike of the Lord. There has been a continuity—in one way or another—of prophecy from Abel onwards. Prophecy not only informs but instructs, which is why the rebellious set their minds against it.

Magic is Discovering and Operating Events Apart From God

Divination (Ezek. 21:21), then, is the art of predicting future events, whilst a **soothsayer** probably used the art of incantation both divining and influencing future events. Reading the **augurs** was the practice of discovering indications of how things were going to happen, and this again was the refusal of God's sovereignty in the world's affairs. The **sorcerer** (Exod. 22:18; Isa. 47:9, 12; Jer. 27:9) or **enchanter** was one who used certain herbs and drugs for magical effects, whilst a **charmer** (Isa. 3:3; Ps. 58:5; Eccl. 10:11; Jer. 8:17)—'one who ties knots'—was one who created magic spells and bound or 'charmed' others. The **medium**, the **wizard**, and the **necromancer** were those who called up and consulted spirits, communicating with and deriving information from the dead. All of these forms of the occult were to overcome, influence and use the natural order according to will and without reference to God.

These forms of the occult were strictly forbidden to Israel. See Exodus 22:18; I Chronicles 10:13; Leviticus 19:26, 31; 20:6, 7; Ezekiel 13:17–23. We can see they were forms of the kingdom of darkness, intended to substitute for God and obedience to Him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN***The Action of Satan in History—VI******A Summary of the Action of Satan******A Picture of Satan as a Created Being***

We see, then, that Satan was created as an angel of light, fell in love with himself, and had the heady ambition of rivalling God—if not surpassing Him. In order to do this he sought the aid of heavenly and earthly creatures, shaping them into a system called the world system, of which he was the 'prince' or 'god'. All such creatures were corrupted and so had an alternative wisdom to that

of God, a wisdom which Paul called ‘the wisdom of this world’. It had the elements of autonomy, ambition, self-seeking and self-extension.

In the Scriptures Satan is depicted in the following terms: ‘the great dragon’ (Rev. 12:9); ‘that ancient serpent . . . the Devil’ (Rev. 12:9); ‘Abaddon’ and ‘Apollyon’, i.e. ‘the destroyer’ (Rev. 9:11); ‘the accuser of our brethren’ (Rev. 12:10; cf. Job chs 1 and 2); ‘the adversary’ (I Pet. 5:8); ‘Beelzebul’ (Matt. 12:24; perhaps of the god Ekron—‘lord of the flies’); ‘Belial’ (II Cor. 6:15); ‘the deceiver of the whole world’ (Rev. 12:9); ‘an enemy’ (Matt. 13:28, 39); ‘the evil one’ (Matt. 13:19, 38); ‘the father of lies’ (John 8:44); ‘the god of this world’ (II Cor. 4:4); ‘the ruler [or prince] of this world’ (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11); ‘a liar’ (John 8:44); ‘the tempter’ (Matt. 4:3; I Thess. 3:5). In John 10:10 he is by inference ‘the thief that comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy’, as also ‘the wolf’ in John 10:12.

Was Satan ‘Late in Time’?

Satan’s alternative system to God’s true Kingdom—the system called ‘the world’—compulsively attacks all that is good (ontological) and seeks to set up its own situation as the true one. In it there is nothing original, but an apeing of God’s true system. It has not only its prince, but principalities, rulers, authorities and powers which should rule as directed by God but which exploit their given offices in the interests of the kingdom of darkness. Human authorities and persons also use their given powers and creational gifts to extend themselves and the system to

which they belong—whether they are conscious of the system or not.

The thought has been expressed that since Satan is mentioned little in the Old Testament, and then mainly as a son of God, taking part in the council of God, that perhaps he did not viciously begin his system or his anti-God practices until much later in history, perhaps mainly about the coming of Jesus the Messiah, i.e. in conformity with Revelation chapter 10.

This can hardly be so. He was ‘the ancient serpent’. He began his works in Eden if he was indeed the subtle creature who tempted Eve and the subject of Ezekiel 28. In the whole system of ‘gods many’ and ‘lords many’, i.e. the whole system of idolatry, and hence of demons, he has always been operative. Whatever appearances he may have kept up as Satan among the sons of God and in the divine council, he has always been powerfully operative. He was busy in the corruption that called for the judgement of the Flood, of the tower of Babel, and of Sodom and Gomorrah.

He has been the father of the evil family of man at least since the time of Cain and Abel (I John 3:10–11; cf. John 8:44). What is not so apparent is that from the commencement of man’s idolatry his system has been in powerful operation. For example, since covenant history began with Abraham there has been a battle to seduce the faithful of that covenant to the fascination of idolatry. As we will see, the greatness of Abraham came in his devotion to God, but it was contested in Israel, for—as we have noted—Israel fell into idolatry in the wilderness, and was always prone to it, finally being sent into exile because of it. Thus we must conclude that Satan has ever been at work, and will ever seek to do so.

We must keep this in mind as we seek in the remainder of our book to see the clash of the two kingdoms.

SECTION TWO

The Personal Matters

We now take off time from reading about the kingdom of Satan to examine the more personal elements of the battle of history. We need to trace the saga of the battle between the two protagonists—Christ and Satan.

The previous section has spoken of the conflict in history, and this will be continued in our third section. In between these we wish to see two things. Firstly we wish to see the personal conflict that ensues in history, for this will aid us in our Christian philosophy of history, and secondly we wish to see how the conflict between Christ and Satan affects man in his own person.

To give an example: a person may be thought to be demonic because of certain manifestations he shows in his personality. To accuse him of having a demon may accelerate some form of fear and hysteria within him, thus confirming the opinion that he is demonized. The evil of man can—in a manner of speaking—even outclass the symptoms of derangement that a demon might induce. It knows one does not have a demon and at the same time knows how dreadful in evil is the human heart to bring the matter to reality.

For these reasons these two essays can be of great value.

CHAPTER ONE

God and His Goal

God and History

Human Ideas of History

In Section 1 of this book we introduced the idea of 'The Kingdom and the Kingdoms', meaning that there is only one kingdom, i.e. the Kingdom of God. Though fallen angels and men may seek to build another kingdom, or each of us his own kingdom, yet there is one kingdom, namely the reign and rule of God over all things.

Not only is this the biblical reality, but if it is not the basic reality of history, then everything is a chaos. Nothing can be assured in the way of peace for heaven and earth. History must be an unending conflict. Religions and philosophies may make their reconciliations of this unending struggle, but the inconclusive nature of history would be an indictment upon its Creator. No one could say with Peter, 'entrust [your] souls to a faithful Creator'. There could be none such if He cannot bring His history to its final reconciliation of all things.

God has His goal for history. For centuries Christian thinking has been linear in regards to history, a way of thinking which is denied to dualism and Eastern monism. In our age of existential thinking, what seems to matter most is our relationships with God and man, rather than what God is about in His creation. If it is merely relationships with God, man and oneself, so that immediate affective stimuli and responses are significant, then history is merely the continuity and evolution of these, so that these are an end in themselves.

In the dialectic of thesis, antithesis and synthesis we may react to the biblical linear view of history. Our age may desire something warmer than calling, election, and predestination which in themselves seem to objectivize history all too much, and so write paid to our pleasant subjectivism, our humanistic pilgrimage to what-ever immediate accomplishment we may happen to effect. It is just too bad if our reaction to God's plan for history happens to put us in opposition to it. If God's word to history is His plan for history, then we must listen to it.

God's Plan For History

It is not difficult to see—biblically—that God has His plan for history. Even so we need to trace the theme from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. In Genesis 1 there is a fore-cast of an earth 'filled' up, i.e. to repletion, and so to completion. What follows this? In Genesis 3:15 we have some kind of a redemptive *telos*—fulfilment. The serpent will be crushed under the feet of the Seed of Woman. In Genesis 49:10 the mysterious 'Shiloh' ('til Shiloh come') is a Messianic figure 'to [whom] shall be the obedience of the peoples [nations]'. The Abrahamic covenant is for the blessing of all nations, for in his—Abraham's—seed shall all the nations be blessed. Israel too has a future in the Suffering Servant who will be 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people, Israel'. In Isaiah 65 and 66 there is to be new heavens and a new earth. Goals certainly abound in the Hebrew Scriptures. The solemn passages of Isaiah 46:8–13, and 48:3–8, warn puny human thinking not to pit itself against God or seek to subvert His eternal decrees. He may do anything at any moment, and what He has intended He surely will bring to pass! The great figures of the Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, Messianic King and the Righteous Branch pass before our eyes and they portend events in history as planned and decided by the immutable Most High.

God the Creator

God's act of creation has innately the intention of God. Shortly we will see how creation and redemption are of

the one piece. An indication of this could be the 4th and 5th chapters of Revelation. In chapter 4 the celestial beings praise God primarily for His creation. In the 5th chapter all creatures praise the Lamb for the redemption he has accomplished.

Redemption is, however, the redemption of creation. It does not stand as an act on its own. Creation and redemption are in juxtaposition which explains both. This we shall see. Immediately we need to see that God's reputation as God is at stake if He is not the 'faithful Creator' (I Pet. 4:19).

To be 'faithful Creator' must mean that all He has created is perfect. It also must mean that in the ultimate creation will be perfect and complete. This is seen by the perfection of the initial creation (Gen. 1:31, 'He saw that it was very good'). Everything was made for its own purpose (Prov. 16:4), man was made upright (Eccl. 7:29), and all things are appropriate in their own time (Eccl. 3:11). Whilst the 'fixed order' of creation (Ps. 148:5-6; Jer. 31:35-36) may not seem orientated towards a goal, all creation is dynamic within this order, and may well have its *telos*—its goal—in the light of Isaiah chapters 65 and 66, and the prophesied 'day of the Lord'.

God the Creator-Redeemer

God is not simply 'Creator', nor is He the Creator who having created finds He must adopt the principle of redemption. Redemption may be for us a matter in time, and even an expedient to meet a contingency. With God it is not so: He had planned redemption prior to what we call 'our time'. Leaving aside the vexed problem of 'time' and

'eternity', we see that God had planned before creation the redemption of man in time. The magnificent 1st chapter of Ephesians tells us He had planned that we should be 'holy and blameless' (1:4), and that we should be predestinated in love 'to be his sons, through Jesus Christ' (1:5).

Paul sees God's grace as inherent, and not prompted by man's terrible plight of sinfulness. We were to be 'to the praise of his glorious grace' (1:6; cf. 2:7-8), i.e. to 'have redemption through his blood' (1:7). In II Timothy 1:9 Paul pursues this principle, 'He saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus *ages ago* [Greek: *before times eternal*]'.

God's Redemption and Creation

God's purpose lies within Himself. Paul saw this when he cried (Rom. 11:36), 'For *from* him and *through* him, and *to* him are all things. To him be glory for ever'. Later he said of Him (I Cor. 8:5-6), 'for us there is one God, the Father, *from* whom are all things, and *for* whom we exist'. He added, '[For there is] one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through* whom are all things and *through* whom we exist'. The writer of Hebrews spoke in the same thought pattern, 'he, *for* whom and *by* whom all things exist' (Heb. 2:10).

The point these passages make are the same as in the ascription by the celestial creatures in Revelation 4:11, 'Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created'. These things

mean that God does not have to show His purposes as being utilitarian. Humanistic man—even humanistic believers—are always imposing upon God the necessity for Him to move in love, compassion and pity. They miss the concomitants—holiness, righteousness, goodness and truth—without which love, compassion and pity are flabby and useless, incompetent to achieve lasting redemption.

God's Creatorhood cannot be separated from His Redeemerhood. His intention for His creation we will further see, but Paul made it clear that the creation should look to the day of its redemption, the day of Christ's appearing. He said, 'But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages [*before times eternal*] for our glorification' (I Cor. 2:7). The creation was not made to no purpose, to be merely the backdrop to the drama of redemption. It is creation which will itself be redeemed. Creation groans in its present bondage to futility, waiting to be released into a state of glorification.

Creation and Redemption

We now see that—in a manner of speaking—redemption is written into creation. The creation was always intended to follow God's plan. In Ephesians Paul uses certain terms relating to this. In 1:9 it is 'the mystery of his will', in 1:10 'a plan for the fullness of time', in 3:3 'the mystery', in 3:4 'the mystery of Christ', and in 3:9 'the plan of the mystery'. By association it is also called 'the manifold wisdom of God' (3:10) and 'the eternal purpose' (3:11). It thus links with 1:11, 'the purpose of

him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will'. Surely these add up to this, that 'the mystery' is that which is hidden from others than the elect, whom it deeply concerns, for they only have the 'hope to which he has called you [them]' (1:18), and this hope relates to 'his glorious inheritance' (1:18).

What we adduce then, is that 'the mystery' is God's plan from before time, for time, to be fulfilled at the end of—what we call—time. In Ephesians this includes the blessing of redemption and holiness, the joining of Jew and Gentile, the gathering together of all things in Christ so that he heads them up. It also includes the 'reconciliation of all things' (Col. 1:19–21), the 'filling up of all things' (Eph. 4:10), the 'harmonizing' of all things (Col. 3:14) and the final glorification of man and creation (Rom. 8:18–25).

It is easy for us to see (a) creation being created, sustained, and finally renewed, and (b) man created and then redeemed from his fallenness in Christ and finally glorified, but it is not always easy to see the link between redemption and creation. This we will seek to do.

The Link Between Creation and Redemption

In Ephesians 3:8–9 Paul said, 'To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is *the plan of the mystery* hidden for ages in God *who created all things*'. Why does Paul state in all this '*who created all things*'? The *plan of the mystery* must relate to creation.

Again in Colossians 1:15–23 it is first stated that

Christ *created* all things, and in the second case that he has reconciled—i.e. redeemed—all things, that is, he has brought back the separated elements to be inseparable.

In Romans 8:18–25 creation is subjected to futility, i.e. cannot fully perform its functional role. With the glorification of the sons of God—i.e. with their full redemption of the body—the creation comes back to normality, or is liberated into glorification. Again creation and redemption are linked.

This may at first sight seem to be a phenomenon of the New Testament, but the doctrine of creation in the Hebrew Scriptures is not limited to the initial creation. The Hebrew thought of God as continuously creating. Whilst we generally think of the verb *bara* ‘to create’ as being used in Genesis (1:1, 21, 27; 2:3; 5:1–2; 6:7—8 times), yet in Isaiah it is used 18 times.

Generally each birth is a new creation of God (Ps. 139:13–16), i.e. each birth is a constant new thing (Amos 4:13; Isa. 40:26; 42:5—and so on). Amos 4:13 says, ‘For lo, he who forms the mountains and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought; who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth—the Lord, the God of hosts, is his name’.

Specifically God creates anew in various ways. If we think of history only as a succession of causes and effects then we miss the heart of creation. In Romans 4:16–25 Paul—in talking of the matter of Abraham’s faith and Isaac’s birth—speaks of the God of Abraham, ‘who gives life to the dead and *calls into existence the things that do not exist*’. (We note in passing that this is also a creation–redemption act and event). Thus we see that God has created Israel (Isa. 43:1, 6–7), has created weal and

woe (Isa. 45:7), salvation (Isa. 45:8), the fruit of the lips (Isa. 57:18), new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17), and Jerusalem and her people (Isa. 65:18). All of these things are creation–redemption acts.

Creation, Redemption and History—An Important Conclusion

We are driven to ask ourselves whether creation and redemption could ever have been separate matters. Ephesians 1:3–14 makes it clear that whilst creation is God’s gift to man, ‘all flesh’ and all that is created, yet He always had purposed the redemption He was to effect in Christ. This being so, all history is really ‘salvation history’, and its goal the vindication of God as ‘a faithful Creator’ because He is Redeemer. The ‘more than Creator’ is expressed in His glorifying of all things. We must not, then, separate His creating work from His redeeming work, or His redeeming work from creation.

The truth of all this is underlined in chapter 10 of the Revelation of John. In this passage ‘another mighty angel’ is depicted coming down from heaven with a little scroll in his hand. With his right foot on the sea and the left on the land he swears by ‘him who lives for ever and ever, *who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it*, that there should be no more delay, but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, *the mystery of God*, as he announced to his servants the prophets, *should be fulfilled*’. Since ‘the mystery of God’ is His redemptive plan relating to creation, then the

fulfilment of His goal is presupposed.

This then, leads us to an important conclusion, namely that the planning of creation was never apart from the planning of redemption. Whilst the creation in part rebelled against God, yet that never altered its essential nature. The rebellious elements could fight their essential created nature but could not alter it. God had planned that redemption would ultimately defeat the hostility of evil and overcome it. This then, utterly dispels the thought which comes to man that God may not succeed in His creation, and in this sense not prove 'faithful' (cf. I Pet. 4:19).

The significance for us is enormous. We need never question God's faithfulness (Lam. 3:22–23). Psalm 57:10 says, 'For thy steadfast love is great to the heavens, thy faithfulness to the clouds'. This means that in the face of fierce and corrupting evil the believer can always live in peace. Nothing can defeat him. Amid all such things he is more than a conqueror. The goal of God is, for him, only good. We need continually to come back to this point, especially when evil would threaten us, cause us dismay, and tempt us to question the integrity of God. Nothing in all heaven and earth can thwart God's plan.

CHAPTER TWO

God and His Eternal Kingdom—I

The Nature of the Kingdom of God

In Section One (pp. 7 & 8) we saw something of the particular nature of the Kingdom of God. We saw firstly that the Kingdom is God's reign and rule over all His creation, no matter how much rebellion may be in it. The rebellion of men and of angels does not affect the sovereignty of God, but represents the determination of the kingdom of darkness to hinder, if not to destroy, God's plan for creation which is at once creational and redemptive. We saw the nature of the kingdom of Satan—the counter-kingdom to the Kingdom of God. Finally we saw

the eschatological triumph of the Kingdom over the kingdom of darkness, and the beginning of its glorious reign. This condensed view of the Kingdom compasses God's action in history but is far too sketchy to do justice to what is a time-wide and creation-wide presence and action. We need, now, to expand our view of the Kingdom of God, keeping our panoramic view of its power and action, and at the same time giving our attention to its detailed operations.

The Creator-God is King Over All the Earth

We define God's Kingdom as God's reign and rule over all. This reign and rule is wholly effective, although the details of history may seem to give the lie to this description. Again we mention that in the widest sense God's Kingdom is His creation, including powers celestial and powers terrestrial, creatures both heavenly and earthly, and all movements of the same. This is recognized in Psalm 103:19, 'The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all'. Ultimately (eschatologically) rebellion and its pollution must be purged from the creation and the Kingdom in its revealed pure form be revealed, sealed off for ever from any further rebellion. This is affirmed in Revelation 11:15 when the seventh angel blows his trumpet and announces, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever'.

Israel sang, 'For the Lord, the Most High, is terrible, a

great king over all the earth . . . Sing praises to our King, sing praises! *For God is the king of all the earth* . . . God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne' (Ps. 47:2-9). The psalmist cried, 'For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations', and again, 'For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods' (Ps. 22:28; 95:3). In Psalm 145:11-13 we read, 'They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and tell of thy power, to make known to the sons of men thy mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of thy kingdom'.

Nebuchadnezzar as a pagan king amplified this acknowledgement of Israel, 'I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him who lives for ever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing; and *he does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth*; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What doest thou?"' (Dan. 4:34, 35).

David, the great king of Israel ascribes no less to God, 'Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; *for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord*, and thou art exalted as head above all' (I Chron. 29:11).

Zechariah prophesies of the coming eschatological climax, 'And *the Lord will become king over all the earth*; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one' (Zech. 14:9). He adds, 'Then every one that survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts' (Zech. 14:16).

We may be tempted to think that the idea of the Kingdom of God gradually evolved from the idea of a tribal god to that of the universal King of all the earth, but this conviction that Yahweh, the King of Israel is also King of all the earth is found in Exodus 15:18; Numbers 23:21; Deuteronomy 33:5; I Samuel 8:7; and then of course, in later stratas such as I Kings 22:19; Psalms 10:16; 24:7–10; 44:4; 93:1; 96:10; 97:1; Isaiah 6:5; 24:23; 33:22; 43:15; and Jeremiah 10:7.

We have noted previously that the Creator-God as King is also the Redeemer-God, and it is to the redemption of Israel and then the nations that the Scriptures refer, especially as God sets His King—Messiah—upon His holy hill (Jerusalem) as set out in Psalm 2 and other places.

God's Particular Kingship of Israel

Israel's view of God as King appears in various phases. The Patriarchs related to God through His covenant, and certainly saw Him as 'God Most High', or 'the Lord God Most High' (Gen. 14:19–22). Israel certainly knew of Yahweh (Exod. 3:14) but it was in the liberation of their nation from Egypt that they saw God act marvellously and knew Him to be over all nations. Whilst in Deuteronomy 17:14–20 provision was made for the nation to have an earthly king, yet this was not to alter the nature of Israel's theocracy—God reigning over them.

That they were His special nation is clear from Exodus 19:5–6, 'Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and

keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (cf. Deut. 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19).

Doubtless Israel did not come up to such expectation, for idolatry divided the ten northern from the two southern tribes, the former becoming apostate and exiled and the latter—later—so decadent that they too were taken into exile. Yet the doctrine of a 'holy remnant' or a 'holy seed' emerged; from this faithful remnant the true Kingdom would come.

Israel's Kingdom to Come

Israel—remembering God's promises, and the great days of David and Solomon—looked for a triumphant Kingdom to come. 'Great David's greater son' was to come and establish this new (or, renewed) Kingdom. The famous prophecy of II Samuel 7:12–14 (cf. Ps. 132:11–18; 89:19–37; cf. I Kings 8:22–25) assured the continuity of David's seed, since it was from Judah that Israel's true—and universal—ruler was to emerge, in conformity with Genesis 49:10.

In order to understand the expectation of Israel—especially as the people were in exile—we need to look at such passages as Isaiah chapters 24 to 27, and 40 to 55. In Isaiah 40:9–11 God tells Israel she will be restored, and God will be her Shepherd. There is a similar reference in Ezekiel 34, which ought to be read with Ezekiel 37:24–28. The great word of the Kingdom is in Isaiah 52:7 where the evangelist on the mountain cries, 'Your God reigns!'

and this was of immense comfort to a nation hopeless in exile.

Again Obadiah 21 announces ‘the kingdom shall be the Lord’s’. In both Isaiah 2 and Micah 4 the Kingdom appears as universal, the nations flowing up to Jerusalem to worship. A similar picture is found in Isaiah 56:6ff. In Zephaniah 3:15ff. God is in the midst of His people delighting over them. As we have seen, in Zechariah 14 the Kingdom is so fulfilled that it is said (v. 9), ‘And the Lord will become king over all the earth; on that day the Lord will be one and his name one’.

In order to understand this hope of Israel we must realize that the promises of God came to the nation by the God who swore by Himself for there could be no greater point of reference. The pain of the nation, and its sense of the loss of its greatness can barely be understood even if a nation today should lose its former glory. God’s promise of His Kingdom transcended ordinary human nationalism and desire for greatness. That kingdoms rise and fall is axiomatic. God could say ‘By me kings reign’, but the future transcendent Kingdom was to surpass human dreams. It was this to which Israel looked.

The King and the Kingdom

If to the above we add such Scriptures as Hosea 14:3f.; Isaiah 2:10ff.; 9:1–6; 11:1–10; 60:1f.; 65:17; 66:22, 24 (cf. Isa. 25:7f.; 26:19; 45:22; 51:4–6), then we see the future Kingdom of Israel is linked with a special kingly reign. Whilst the term ‘Messiah’ (cf. Ps. 2:2, 6; I Sam. 2:10; cf. Luke 1:46–55; Dan. 9:25–26) is rarely used in the Hebrew writings, its idea in essence is in

many other passages, such as Isaiah 9:1–6, and 11:1–10 in which the coming One is the Son, the stem of Jesse, the universal ruler. These magnificent passages point to an idyllic kingdom to come.

Likewise ‘the Prince’ or ‘an anointed one’ of Daniel 9:25–26 is also a strong leader. The ‘son of man’ of Daniel chapter 7 is to have rule of all the nations, and his kingdom is to be perpetual. The ‘suffering servant’ mentioned in Isaiah chapters 40 to 66 is one who relieves his people of their suffering. The ‘appointed shepherd of God’ in Ezekiel 34 (found again in Ezek. 37) is of the line of David. Likewise the ‘righteous Branch’ (Jer. 23:5–6; 33:15) will be of Davidic lineage and will restore the nation and cause it to live in security, i.e. in a true and inviolate kingdom. When all these predictions merge into the one special Person under whom Israel’s kingdom will flourish it is no wonder that Israel in exile, and Israel which had returned to Palestine, looked to the great Kingdom to come.

The Kingdom of God and the Day of the Lord

What we have to realize is that Israel believed in the sovereignty of God, that He reigned over all the nations—all appearances to the contrary—yet it knew that this *de jure* rule did not appear to the nations to be *de facto*, and for the nations ‘seeing is believing’. Israel had the doctrine and hope of ‘the day of the Lord’. In some prophetic passages this was to be a terror to the evil, and to those who held false confidence. To the true Israel it was to be

the greatest of days for God would vindicate Himself, bring justice to completion and establish His Kingdom *de facto*, so that what had been *de jure*, but unseen, would now be seen and known. History would show the sovereignty of God to have been the immutable reality. This day could be called 'the great day' (Joel 2:11; Zeph. 1:14) or 'the day of wrath' (Zeph. 1:15, 18; 2:3).

CHAPTER THREE

***God and His Eternal
Kingdom—II***

Christ and the Kingdom of God

The Coming of the Promised Kingdom

We have to keep in mind the fact that since God is over everything, then in one sense His Kingdom never has to come. However, in the face of celestial and terrestrial rebellion within His Kingdom there is a very real sense in which His Kingdom does come, and this from time

to time, and eventually, of course, eschatologically. In its history of being ruled by other nations Israel looked to the coming triumphant Kingdom of God, and whilst many in Israel thought in terms that were somewhat national, yet thoughtful Jews saw God's Kingdom as overcoming the nations, ruling them firmly, and bringing in universal peace and joy. All nations would worship the Lord.

The immediate problem that faced Israel in the days of the New Testament was the domination of Rome. Many Messiahs—so-called—had risen to liberate Israel, but their attempts had not only failed but had brought suffering to the nation. Hence the caution with which Jesus was treated in his time.

For the true Messiah to come unannounced—so to speak, 'off his own bat'—we can see in retrospect would have been unthinkable. He was announced by God at his baptism, and by John the Baptist about the time of that baptism. John, then, is an important person in the matter of the coming of the Kingdom.

John the Baptist and the Kingdom

John's person and ministry are quite remarkable, and show him to be a unique prophet. Quite a portion of the text of the Gospels and Acts is given to him. The miraculous nature of his birth, accompanied by angelic visitants, the prophetic utterances of his priest-father Zechariah and his leaping in Elizabeth's womb all show his prophetic uniqueness. Whilst the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15ff. is greater than John (cf. Acts 3:20–25),

yet he—John—is the prophet whose coming is prophesied *par excellence*, for apart from 'the prophet' of Deuteronomy 18 he is the only prophet whose coming is prophesied. The scriptures of Malachi 3:1f., 4:1–5 and Isaiah 40:1–3 are applied to him. Jesus spoke of him as Elijah *redivivus* and said that he was greatest of men born of women.

Zechariah's prophecy should be studied closely in regard to John's ministry as precursor to Messiah's coming. The covenant to Abraham was about to be fulfilled, and whilst Zechariah appears to apply it mostly to Israel, yet the more universal nature of the covenantal promise is also present—'to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace'.

John's Revelation of Jesus

John spoke of three elements of Jesus' ministry, i.e. (a) the coming of the universal Kingdom (Matt. 3:1–12), (b) the universal forgiveness of sins which would relate to the Kingdom (Mark 1:4; John 1:29), and (c) universal outpouring of the Spirit (Mark 1:8; John 1:32–34). All of these related to that figure prophesied in the Old Testament, of whom we have spoken above, i.e. the one who was to be Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man, the Suffering Servant—and so on. Whilst John at one time seemed to doubt, or be tempted to doubt that Jesus was truly this Coming One, yet he seems to have been reassured by the accounts sent back to him in prison, of the ministry of Jesus (Luke 7:18–27).

It is difficult for us to realize how significant was

John's testimony to Jesus (cf. John 1:6–8, 19–23, 29–34; 5:31–35). When Jesus said of him that he was 'a prophet, yes, and greater than a prophet', he doubtless meant that John was the immediate precursor of the coming of Messiah and his Kingdom, and that no other prophet had come so close to seeing the coming of the Kingdom. The Jewish leaders had never been able to handle the matter of John, for the nation generally believed him to be a man sent from God, and they dared not say John's baptism was of man, as also they did not care to say it was of God (Matt. 21:23–27)!

John and the Day of Wrath of the Lord

John, in preaching the Kingdom of God as a joyous accomplishment, also had the 'day of wrath' in mind, for he knew the Kingdom could only come in that day of the Lord, and that judgement had to happen. In Matthew 3:7–10 he asked the Pharisees and Sadducees who were coming for baptism, 'Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?'. He called them a 'brood of vipers' meaning that the Kingdom would only spell judgement for them, and not a 'great day'. Their claim to blood descent from Abraham was scorned as God could—and would—raise up children from the stones if that were necessary. Right now He was about to judge Israel in the coming of the Kingdom's Messiah, whom He nominated as Jesus. There would then be no full coming of the Kingdom unless it were also the day of the Lord, the time of judgement. Later in the New Testament we see the development of this idea, as for example in Romans 2:5, Jude 6, and Revelation 6:17.

Jesus and the Kingdom

Mark places Jesus' announcement of the Kingdom as coming on the heels of the arrest of John by Herod (Mark 1:14–15), 'Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the gospel"'. John—as precursor—had been essential. Now the matter of the Kingdom was concentrated on Jesus. John's work was finished ('He must increase, but I must decrease'), and the matter of the Kingdom was to open—and proceed—with Jesus.

What then do we understand by the statement, 'believe the gospel'? Obviously this means 'the gospel of the kingdom'. What is the Gospel of the Kingdom? It must surely derive from Isaiah 52:7, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns"'. Israel was told that God reigns (*de jure* and *de facto*), meaning that Israel's servitude will be ended, the day of the Lord is imminent, and salvation is about to come. We will see later that the 'gospel of the kingdom' and the 'gospel of salvation' are indeed the one.

The Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of Heaven

The terms 'kingdom of God' and 'kingdom of heaven' are used synonymously by Matthew. Mark, Luke and John use the term 'kingdom of God'. Both terms point to the reign and rule of God rather than to a kingdom such

as we know, i.e. one with a king and with perimeters. It is 'the Kingship of God' (or the heavens) which is understood. Entrance to this Kingdom is by repentance (Matt. 3:3; cf. John 3:5; 'of water', i.e. the baptism of repentance), by the new birth through the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-6), and by becoming as a little child (Matt. 18:1-4). Doubtless, belief in, and submission to, Christ the King is also inferred.

Jesus Installed as Messiah and King

Jesus' baptism is highly significant. God declares him to be His Son in terms of Psalm 2—especially verses 6 and 7—and Isaiah 42:1. These references show him as King, as Son, and as the one who possesses the Spirit and who 'will bring forth justice to the nations'. The confession of Nathanael (John 1:49), 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!', parallels that of Peter (Matt. 16:16), 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God'. These are Messianic utterances and relate to Peter's post-resurrection declaration concerning Jesus (Acts 10:38), 'how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him'. The baptism, then, was Jesus' installation as Son, as Messiah and as King. These three terms are virtually synonymous, and constitute offices of the one person.

Even so, we must see that whilst the Kingdom came in the person of Jesus, it did not come eschatologically. It came with the eschatological powers but did not fully enact the eschatological climax. The day of the Lord was

yet to come, but the first and most significant instalment of this was Jesus' ministry and the defeat of the enemies of the Kingdom in his Cross, Resurrection and Ascension.

Jesus Being the Kingdom of God

Jesus came as the King, as the Kingdom. Later in the New Testament the Kingship of the Kingdom is accorded to both the Father and the Son (cf. Eph. 5:5; Rev. 11:15; 12:10; I Cor. 15:24-28), but in the Gospels Jesus is Messiah through the Spirit, the fact being announced by Jesus himself at Nazareth in the reading of Isaiah 61:1-2, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord'. To this reading Jesus added, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'. The King, then, has come to release the captives from Satan's oppression and liberate them into the full freedom of the Kingdom, the same principle as Peter later sets out in Acts 10:38.

The key verse to this whole principle of the King in action is Matthew 12:28, 'But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you'. Thus when he healed the woman who had a spirit of infirmity he told her, 'You are freed from your infirmity', and explained to his critics that she had been 'bound of Satan eighteen years' (Luke 13:10-17).

When John and Jesus use the term 'the kingdom of

God is at hand' they do not mean that the Kingdom has already come in fullness. Yet Jesus could say that when he exorcised demons the Kingdom had come as a great power *upon* evil. When his disciples used this *delegated* authority—as in Luke 10:9 (cf. 9:2)—they could only say, 'the kingdom of God has come *near* to you'. Even so, the power of the Kingdom was evident, for Jesus later said of their exorcism, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven!'

The theme of Jesus *being* the Kingdom is seen in his discussion concerning 'the Strong Man'. Satan is the Strong Man but Jesus is 'Stronger than the Strong Man' and overcomes him, invading his domain, releasing prisoners, and dividing the resultant spoil (Luke 11:14–23; Matt. 12:22–30). Whilst Jesus states to his enemies—and thus to the powers of darkness—that the hour of his judgement and crucifixion is, 'your hour and the authority of darkness', yet his being God's King in Israel is seen powerfully in those climactic acts of the Cross, the Resurrection and the Ascension, where he defeated the powers of darkness, including the Strong Man (John 12:31; 14:30–31; 16:11; Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15). In addition to his acts of defeating evil, and liberating men and women, his being as King was also revealed in his teaching of the Kingdom.

The Actions That Displayed the Kingdom

We have seen the principle of Jesus being the dynamic King, i.e. his defeat of the powers of darkness by his actions. His statement of Isaiah 61:1–2 was clear enough. He saw his actions as liberating men and women from

the dire straits into which they had come, presumably by their sin, and the invading and oppressing action of Satan (Acts 10:38). Were these miracles and signs in conformity with the prophetic Messianic prediction? We have to say, 'Yes!'. Peter indicated this on the day of Pentecost, 'Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst'. In other words the works and signs attested him, but they would have attested *per sé*. They needed to be predicted signs and wonders. So in accordance with Isaiah 35:5f., Jesus told the enquiring John the Baptist, 'The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, and the poor have the good news preached to them', for the Isaianic word had been, 'Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing'.

The Significance of Jesus' Kingdom Action

Did Jesus simply do what was predicted in order to be seen as authentic, or was there more than this? In John's Gospel he refers time and again to his signs and words, saying the Father has directly caused him to accomplish such works. The works and the words are unique be-cause of his relationship with the Father, therefore he is to be received. He is the Son doing the Father's will and so the works attest to him—as Son and Messiah. Powerful and necessary as this is, we see that his works and words also had submission to the Kingdom in mind. Jesus addressed the cities of Galilee, 'Woe to you, Chorazin! . . . Bethsaida!

For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, *they would have repented* long ago, in sackcloth and ashes' (Matt. 11:21; Luke 10:13). Repentance was in mind, for John had called for that in the face of the coming Kingdom.

Further to this we see that the signs were signs of the Kingdom. They (a) pointed *to* the Kingdom for signs are to be read: the miracles were not miracles in themselves but signs leading *to* the Kingdom, and (b) were the signs *of* the Kingdom, for in the Kingdom there is no blind-ness, deafness, sickness, suffering and death. Hence, when the Kingdom 'comes upon' that which is defective it brings it to perfection (cf. Rev. 21:1–5).

These observations should teach us to see that the Kingdom did not come in fullness in Palestine during the ministry of Jesus. The writer of Hebrews says aptly, that we are those who have tasted of the powers of the age to come, i.e. the new age will be the Kingdom in full bloom. Jesus' Kingdom ministry was a visitation with purpose, but not a total execution, i.e. the fulfilment of the Kingdom. It revealed the powers of the Kingdom (I Cor. 4:20) and the nature of the Kingdom, as also some effects of the Kingdom, but the Kingdom's fulfilment was (is) yet to come.

Jesus' treatment of the Kingdom of God in John's Gospel is consonant with all this. The Kingdom can only be seen by repentance which leads to faith and new birth. The Kingdom is 'not from this world' but when one reads the signs and so believes in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, then one receives eternal life, i.e. the Kingdom (John 3:3–6; 18:36–37; 20:30–31).

One further point needs to be stressed, and although it

applied specifically to Israel, it applies generally to all humanity. In Luke 11:14–26 where the matter of the Strong Man is discussed, Jesus said in regard to the conflict between the Strong Man and himself, 'He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters'. He meant there is no neutrality in this moral war. He then went on to tell the story of the man who had an unclean spirit, and when it went from him, cleaned his heart only to find that seven other spirits returned with the first spirit and took up their habitation in the man. It appears that Jesus is saying that Israel has reformed itself from idols, but—following its 'reformation'—is now in an even worse state than before. It is against such a state that the Kingdom comes.

Jesus Teaching the Kingdom of God

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God was 'at hand' (Mark 1:14–15), that in the time of his presence 'the good news of the kingdom of God is preached' (Luke 16:16; Matt. 11:13), and that 'everyone enters it with violence'. The reign of the Kingdom would come *with power* (Mark 9:2), and since some of the generation standing before Jesus were to see this, he may have been referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70—the first judgemental instalment of the eschatological climax. Even so, the Gospel of the Kingdom was to be preached to all nations, for only then would the Kingdom come (Matt. 24:14), and only then would Jesus drink wine (afresh) in the Kingdom (Luke 22:14–16). Whilst at first sight a reading of the Gospels would seem to say that Jesus expected a

quick incoming of the Kingdom, many of his statements belie an immediate expectation. If we see in Matthew 24 two actions of the Kingdom in history, i.e. (a) the destruction of Jerusalem, and (b) the coming of the climactic day of the Lord, then we will not confuse the two strands of prediction concerning the Kingdom. Even so, the Kingdom was present in Palestine in the person of Jesus, and Paul can speak of believers as having been transferred from the power of darkness into the Kingdom of his beloved Son (Col. 1:13–14).

Jesus Teaching on the Nature of the Kingdom

Jesus' teaching was that the Kingdom is a mystery. He told his disciples concerning the Kingdom parables (Mark 4:11), 'To you has been given the *secret* (Gk. *mysterion*, i.e. mystery) of the kingdom of God, but for those out-side everything is in parables'. This is much like the saying of Jesus that until one was born again (from above) he could not *see* the Kingdom of God (John 3:3). He told them (Matt. 13:16–17; cf. Luke 10:23f.), 'Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it'. So much of a mystery is the Kingdom that Jesus refuses to disclose it to ears that refuse to hear. He constantly cries out, 'He that has an ear to hear let him hear!'. He warns against wrong hearing. He even insists—in the light of the mystery of predestination—that his very proclamation of the Kingdom will harden the hearts of those who refuse to hear and bring judgement upon them (Luke 8:10; Isa. 6:9–10; Jer. 5:21).

The main part of teaching about the Kingdom is found, (a) in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. chs 5 to 7) and (b), in the parables as in Matthew chapter 13 and elsewhere. In the Sermon on the Mount we read of the primary nature of the Kingdom—we are to seek it first. The Father of the Kingdom is the One to whom we should always advert, and this is underlined in the Lord's Prayer. In Matthew 13 we see more of the *mystery* of the Kingdom as it takes its various forms.

The parables of the Kingdom deal with the present mystery of the Kingdom, i.e. seed sown, seed growing secretly, the growth of the Kingdom as leaven in meal, as the mustard seed growing to a tree, the true seed and the false, the good fish and the bad, and then the judgements which are coming on the day of the Lord, at the end-time. Such teaching was to prove valuable for genuine believers who would be puzzled about the seeming discrepancy between the *de jure* and *de facto* aspects of the Kingdom in history.

Conclusion to the Nature and Action of the Kingdom Under Jesus in His Ministry

We conclude—at this point—that Jesus became Messiah-King of the Kingdom at his baptism, and that he was the Kingdom, i.e. the Kingship itself as he proclaimed its Gospel, told its truth and executed its actions. To the point, then, of his triumphal entrance into Jerusalem as Israel's King, he had successfully proclaimed and enacted the Kingdom.

What, then, was the point of the events of the Cross, the Resurrection and the Ascension? This we must examine for without them the irruption of Christ into history was a mere visit or temporary invasion, and this without great purpose.

CHAPTER FOUR

***God and His Eternal
Kingdom—III***

***Christ and His Eternal Victory—I:
The Power of His Life and Ministry***

The Objects or Goals of the Kingdom

We can say that there are certain objects in view in regard to the Kingdom of God. The first is that God will prove to be 'faithful Creator' by bringing His creation fully under His rule, especially with a view to the new heavens and the new earth. In this new—i.e. renewed system—there will be only righteousness. Nothing unclean shall enter into it.

The goal requires the judgement and punishment of all that is unclean and evil. When the Kingdom comes in all its fullness then the defeat of evil will be complete.

Another goal is the glorification of all things, i.e. the filling of all that is empty, the reconciliation of all that is disparate, the unification of all things, and the harmonizing of them in love. These things are really the one, and are spoken about in I Corinthians 2:7–10; Romans 8:18–30; Ephesians 4:10; Colossians 1:19–21; Ephesians 1:9–10; and Colossians 3:15. Intimate pictures of this eschatological state are found in the Old Testament prophets.

In view of God being Father-Creator-Redeemer, part of God's plan is to have His elect to be holy and without blame before Him, and for them to be His sons to the praise of the glory of His grace, as also to the praise of His own glory (Eph. 1:3–14; Rom. 8:28–30; I John 3:1–3). This means they will be 'sons of the kingdom', a phrase generally understood in the Old Testament and which was mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 8:12. It is about the equivalent of 'sons of the prophets and the covenant' (Acts 3:25). It is almost the equivalent of 'sons of Abraham'—a term generally used for God's people (cf. Matt. 3:9; 8:12; Gal. 3:9, 26).

God's plan, then, is to have His sons in the Kingdom at the end-time. Whilst in the present time they are in that Kingdom (Col. 1:13–14; Rom. 14:17), they are yet to enter or inherit it in all fullness (I Cor. 6:9–11; Eph. 5:5; Gal. 5:19–21). There is a sense in which although God has given the Kingdom to His people (Luke 22:28; cf. 12:28–29) they are yet to inherit it. Much is spoken of the elect inheriting the Kingdom, and of it having been

prepared for them even before the foundation of the world (Matt. 25:31–34).

The Saints Receiving the Kingdom

In the famous passage of Daniel 7:9–27 we are shown the Son of Man who receives the Kingdom from God — 'And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed'. This is of importance because four great beasts (i.e. powerful nations) sought to establish their rule amongst the nations, but the saints fought these beasts—particularly the fourth beast—and although temporarily the beast prevailed over the saints, yet 'the Ancient of Days came and judgement was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints received the kingdom' (vv. 21–22). Of them it is later said, 'And the kingdom, and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them'.

When John the Baptist announced the Kingdom of God to be at hand, then some would have thought in terms of the Daniel 7 passage. Jesus urged all to seek the Kingdom of heaven first, and in Luke 12:32 told his disciples, 'Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom'. It is to be noted that the sons of the Kingdom, the prophets and the covenant are indeed few since few enter at the narrow gate,

but to them is given the Kingdom (cf. Luke 22:28–29), and they will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. In Daniel 7 it appears that judgement being given for the saints, they then rule over all nations.

In Romans 5:17 through grace the justified saints ‘reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ’. In Ephesians 2:5–6 the same saints are raised with Christ, and are seated and reign with him in heavenly places. This is happening now in part, but the full reigning is eschatological, for just as Israel was the priest-nation among all the nations (Exod. 19:5–6) so the new people of God are ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’ (I Pet. 2:9). In the Revelation they are ‘a kingdom, priests to [their] God and Father’, and as ‘a kingdom and priests to [their] God and they shall reign on the earth’, and ‘they shall reign for ever and ever’ (1:6; 5:10; 20:4; 22:5).

We see, then, that to be given the Kingdom is to be included as ‘sons of the kingdom’ into God’s high calling to reign in eternity. There will ultimately be no conflict because the clash of the kingdoms will have ceased. Meanwhile, it is with much tribulation that we move towards entering the Kingdom (Acts 14:22) and in the conflict of the kingdoms we suffer much for the Kingdom of God (II Thess. 1:4–5; cf. Matt. 5:10–11).

The Victory That Secured the Kingdom

In the whole matter of the clash of the kingdoms of God and of Satan, Messiah’s coming was intended to engage the kingdom of darkness in a struggle which would end

in the defeat of evil. Whilst that struggle in one sense still continues in history, yet in another sense the outcome has been sealed. The victory—as we shall now study it—was intended before time, was prophesied in time through the Proto-Evangel of Genesis 3:15, and was carried out in time. This was through the struggle with idolatry by the true God; especially in the action of the incarnation, the dynamic ministry of Christ as King of the Kingdom, as victor by the Cross, and as Lord of all through the Ascension, and now, as he reigns at the right hand of God.

Christ Destroying the Works of the Devil

John’s statement, ‘The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil’ (I John 3:8), is a strong one. In one word the clash of the kingdoms is indicated. When we think of the vast number of devilish works done by Satan, then the destruction of these by Christ seems a monumental—if not impossible—task. It is partly explained by Hebrews 2:14–15, ‘Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage’.

The Works of the Devil

When we ask, ‘What are the works of the devil?’, then we answer that they include Satan’s rebellion against God,

the fall of angelic powers, the setting up of the world system with its own wisdom, the temptation and fall of man, the coming of death, the reign of sin through fear of death, the reign of death through the tyranny of sin, the bondage of demonic powers through oppression and sicknesses, the power and hostility of the flesh against God, the inciting of the wrath of the holy God, the fracture of the relationships of the human race, and the inculcation of bitterness, hatred and anger throughout the creation.

If possible an even more terrible operation concerns ‘the works of the devil’, namely Satan’s emulation of God. His high pride has conceived a system which is not merely the counterfeit of the real, but the counterpart to it all, with the insane hope that it will dethrone God’s system. Hence the unontological, anti-ontological, and ante-ontological pretensions of Satan, namely that he has a kingdom which is unbeatable, a counterpart trinity of which he is the father, the beast an incarnate christ, and the unholy spirit the image or false prophet. The most frightening of all drives is that of being worshipped in God’s temple as very-god himself!

***The Destruction Principle
For Breaking Moral Evil***

How, then, does Christ destroy these innumerable works?

One answer might appear sufficient, namely that God has such power that merely by thinking or willing any-thing He can accomplish the destruction of all evil. This idea is rooted in the view that God’s metaphysical power

is total and absolute, accomplishing all He will by very force. This answer cannot stand. Whilst predestination is God’s prerogative, He actually accomplishes all things according to His will which operates through His inscrutable wisdom. We know, for example, that He made Christ to be His wisdom in righteousness, sanctification and redemption (I Cor. 1:31) so that He does not just work by naked power. In hindsight we say that God being who He is, man being who and what he is, and the creation being who and what it is, nothing could (would) ever have happened other than it has happened.

Another way of saying this is that since God gave celestial and terrestrial creatures—angels and man in particular—choice of will, then what has happened was bound to happen. The question, ‘Why did not God make men and angels to be obedient without the possibility of sinning?’ indicates the shallow thinking of the questioner. What we are shut up to is that all evil is a moral question related to the will of God’s creatures. The only way out of man’s predicament is the grace of salvation. Worry and argue as we may we cannot by-pass this principle. That is why grace enrages the autonomous human spirit, setting man off on his own self-saving ventures of religions, philosophies and ideologies.

The most difficult thing for us to understand is that God is not omnipotent to the point where He can—and will—change all things by His own sheer power. The difficulty in understanding lies in our refusal to understand the holy nature of God, and the unholy nature of His fallen creatures. We are far too shallow in our thinking to even appreciate the moral dilemma of men and angels in history.

Christ's Destructive Weapons For the Battle

We must first understand that man—in particular—is in bondage to many enemies through his sin and its accompanying guilt. We must be careful not to think of him as defending himself against deeply hostile enemies. Man in his rebellion against God (Gen. 3:1–6; Rom. 1:20–32) has gone his own way. He has no desire to be under Satan's bondage. Although the whole world system lies in Satan and sinful man with it (I John 5:19), yet man is bitterly opposed to the powers of evil oppressing him. Man was entrapped into the world system through his rebellion against God, and his rebellious spirit assists in keeping him there.

Had man not sinned, and were he to have no guilt, then he would not be subject to any enemy. He would be with God and so be inviolate. His fear of death (Heb. 2:14–15) is fear of judgement (I John 4:16–18) so that death has a terrible sting, and sin a frightening power—through guilt (I Cor. 15:55–56; John 8:31–36; Rom. 3:9ff.; cf. Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21f.). That is why Satan can manipulate man by accusation, bringing to him the hopelessness of his situation and increasing his hostility to God, thus further entrapping him. Because of this, man lives in the hostility of the flesh (Rom. 8:5–8), in the bondage of demons, idols, and other elementary powers (II Thess. 1:10; Col. 2:14–15; Gal. 4:8; Col. 2:18–23).

When Christ had spoken concerning his coming victory over the Strong Man he said he would 'take away his armour in which he [Satan] trusted'. If we read Ephesians

6:10–18 then Satan's armour would be constituted of the things opposite to God's armour, although Satan would claim them to be the same! Satan cannot have truth, hope, faith, peace, salvation or the true word, hence his armour is useless. Most powerful is his use of the guilt of a sinner, but Christ overthrows him with the word of true pardon, forgiveness and cleansing. As Luther said, 'One little word shall fell him'. That 'little word' is the great word of salvation, wrought as it was in the conflict of the Atonement. Against holy redeeming love no evil power can stand. It is unmasked, unhanded, mortified and flies shrieking in dread from such purity.

The Beginning of the Battle

We have said above that the battle began following creation. Much of its form and modes of operation we do not know. We will later retrace our steps to see the incursion of idolatry and the moral destruction of ancient man, but now we are concerned with the things that attended and followed the incarnation of the Son of God—the one sent to destroy the works of the devil.

Satan, His Modes of Attack and Attrition

We could say that the battle between Christ and Satan began when the dragon—'that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'—sought to destroy the Christ-child, 'And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it

forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days’.

The woman is surely Israel or the people of God. The child who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron (Ps. 2:9; cf. Rev. 2:27; 19:15) is Jesus the Christ and Lord. The dragon sought to devour her child, i.e. annihilate him. This could refer to the massacre of the Innocents by Herod, or it could refer to the incessant attacks on Jesus by Satan, i.e. at the time of temptation, the various actions of attempted stoning, and the attempt on the lake to drown him and his disciples. Most powerfully the Satanic action is seen in the judgement of Jesus by Pilate and the Jewish leaders culminating in the fury of evil when its storms raged about the Son of Man upon the Cross.

The opposition of Satan in the temptation was an attempt to deflect Jesus from the way of the Cross—the only way evil could have been defeated, moral pollution could have been purged and the human race be saved. Out of his arrogance and lust for worship the devil offered Christ the kingdoms of the world. Revelation 12:5 says firmly, ‘a male child, one who is to rule the nations’. This ruling we see in Genesis 49:10 where the world-ruler is to come from the tribe of Judah—‘to him shall be the obedience of the nations’—and as we saw, was to be the ‘anointed one’ and ‘the king’ of Psalm 2. Had Jesus received the kingdoms which were temporarily under Satan’s authority he would have lost them—and him-self—for ever. Later it was Peter after his confession of

Christ as ‘the Messiah the Son of the living God’ who unconsciously sought to subvert Christ from the way of the Cross. ‘Get thee behind me, Satan’, Christ rebuked him.

We also see Satan’s opposition in the cry of the demon (Luke 4:34), ‘What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God’. This evil challenge and sneering unholy confession was rejected by Jesus who exorcised the demon from the man. On another occasion the demons begged Jesus not to command them to depart into the abyss (Luke 8:31). He certainly had authority over the demons and this was recognized by the people. The leaders saw the power he wielded, and accused him of casting out demons by Beelzebul the prince of demons, but he rapidly demolished their argument.

His defeat of Satan was also seen in his ‘healing all those who were oppressed of the devil’. In the mystery of man’s ignorance, guilt, evil and alienation from God, Satan has certain powers to inflict sickness. It was generally understood that most often these sicknesses came from oppressive demonic spirits, who from time to time dominated their hosts. Christ’s statement, ‘If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you’, is sufficient to show us Jesus’ power over all evil. Just as he *rebuked* the demon in the synagogue at Capernaum (Luke 4:35), so he *rebuked* the sickness in Peter’s mother-in-law (Luke 4:39), and later (Luke 8:24) he *rebuked* the fierce wind which threatened to destroy him and his disciples on the lake of Galilee. They marvelled, ‘Who then is this, that he commands even wind and water, and they obey him?’.

The Assailing Temptations

The writer of Hebrews said of Jesus, 'For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted' (2:16–18). In addition he said (4:15), 'We have . . . one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin'. We recognize that Jesus did not have within him the element called by the old theologians 'concupiscence', i.e. an element which responded to temptation. Nevertheless, it was part of his human struggle to keep alert against the temptations which came from Satan in the form of coercion, threats, deceit and seduction. Many people collapse with such continuing attrition.

The Attacks of the Jewish Leaders

It may sound strange to say that the Jewish leaders were the instruments of Satan used to destroy Jesus. The Pharisees were very active in opposing Jesus. We cannot read all four Gospels without recognizing that. Paul gives us a window into their thinking and action when—confessing that he had been a Pharisee—he claimed that he was, as touching the law, blameless (Phil. 3:6). This was an astonishing statement, but an indication of the terrible drive man knows—and has—to justify himself. Jesus' teaching confronted the self-righteous as we see so

powerfully in the story of the taxgatherer and the Pharisee in the temple (Luke 18:9–14). To the horror of the hearers the sinful taxgatherer went home justified, but not the Pharisee. No wonder they fiercely opposed him.

No less did the Sadducees oppose him. Virtually ruling the temple, having no sense of the supernatural, and being materialists, they saw him as a threat to the business of the temple, and the peace of the community. John at the time of administering baptism had called both Sadducees and Pharisees 'a brood of vipers'. In the Gospels we see the mounting opposition, the polarization of those who believed and those who refused to do so. In John's Gospel Jesus' opposition to the latter, and his statement that they were of their father the devil and could not know truth, enraged them. The self-righteous and the materialists are never on the side of the angels! They become pawns of Satan—and so they were. When he raised Lazarus from the dead they viewed the matter with horror, not knowing where it would end. They had to kill him, and perhaps in order to prove to themselves that he was not indeed the Son of God.

A Conclusion—The Battle from Baptism to the Cross

The picture of the dragon waiting to devour the child is horrible enough. In practical fact it constituted the battle Jesus experienced from his baptism to the Cross. All evil sought to destroy him, but he was inviolate because God controls both the *kairos* of the devil and the *kairos* (the appropriate time of a happening) of Christ. The terms 'the

fullness of time', 'due time', 'his hour' and 'the hour' all tell us that nothing happens outside the sovereignty of God, and all that happens inside that sovereignty is for ultimate good. This explains the traitorous action of Judas, and the event of the Cross (cf. Acts 2:22–23). The battle from the Cross was unremitting, evil constantly harassing him. Not to be forgotten is that, in fact, it was he who powerfully harassed Satan, demons, unclean spirits, and similar forces.

CHAPTER FIVE

***God and His Eternal
Kingdom—IV***

***Christ and His Eternal Victory—II:
The Battle of the Cross***

Man's Dilemma

The dilemma of fallen man, we have already seen, is namely that his rebellion against God brought him to alienation from God, to loss of true life, to human guilt, and to ultimate judgement. At the same time it brought him under the power of Satan the accuser and deceiver, as also under bondage to Satan's *aeon* (system) or *kosmos* (world),

and so brought him to the so-called ‘wisdom of the world’. He had become flesh, opposed to God’s law, rebellious, seeking to live autonomously, but because of his guilt never being totally free and able to enjoy his existence in time.

Being under judgement, man cannot extricate himself, for even if he had a mind to keep God’s law (an impossibility by nature of the case) and were able to observe it, yet that would not exempt him from judgement on the basis of a profit and loss ledger account. Man’s violation of the holiness of God even by what we may call ‘a little sin’ is so terrible and so far-reaching as to evade the imagination. God is of purer eyes than to behold evil and He cannot look upon evil without fully judging and punishing it.

Were there to be no Cross and Resurrection, then there could be no salvation. Something had to happen in the Cross to destroy the guilt of man, and set him free from his enemies. Nor would such a happening automatically redeem all men. It would simply be a redemption available for all were they to repent, having faith in God, and thrusting themselves upon His mercy and upon His grace.

The Preparation of Gethsemane

Armchair theologians tend to think in theological abstractions. There are many theories of the Atonement, and most—if not all—have good views of the saving work of Christ even though their theories may differ in some respects. Gethsemane takes the Atonement from the

merely theoretical, or passionless views of what is called ‘objective theology’. Since Jonathan Edwards wrote his ‘A Treatise on the Religious Affections’ we are bound to see that all true religion is affectional—if not emotional.

Certainly Gethsemane was not passionless. Indeed it was the very passion of Christ. As he went to the Mount of Olives he told his disciples that they would all fall away from him that night (Matt. 26:31; cf. Zech. 13:7) because his death would be a scandal. In the garden of Gethsemane he said, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death’. This was neither empty rhetoric nor hyperbole. What he was saying was that he was dying. He prayed three times that this cup of death should pass from him. His true cup of death was to be the Cross, and in spite of the traditional belief that he shuddered at the Cross and would wish to withdraw, the great weight of evidence is that he thought he was dying in the garden, and did not wish to do so! He wished to die on the Cross. This appears to be borne out by Hebrews 5:7–8, and possibly by the old text of Luke 22:43, ‘And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him’, and this, doubt-less, was so that he would not perish in the garden.

Our minds flash back to Matthew 4:11 where it was said that ‘angels came and ministered to him’ after his battle with Satan in the wilderness. In Luke 22:43 ancient authorities say, ‘And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him’. Was Gethsemane, then, some sort of temptation parallel with the conflict in the wilderness? Is it possible, then, that he battled directly with the dark forces of evil in Gethsemane? Was the dark form of Satan present? Gethsemane has been called ‘the beginning of sorrows’, and so it is possible that he

wrestled with Satan in this garden, if not directly, then indirectly in that he was taking upon himself the sins of the world. Only a short time later he was to say to his enemies, 'Now is your hour and the authority of darkness'. Would that not include the whole incident of Gethsemane? Why did he reproach his disciples for not *watching* with him one hour? Hebrews 5:7 appears to fit this occasion when he prayed 'with loud cries and tears' to be saved out of death.

Gethsemane may ever remain an unexplained mystery to us, but certainly it denotes a special preparation for the hours of his judgement and crucifixion. It shows us that Jesus was no stoic, and that the way of weakness would have to win the day.

The Battle of the Cross

The Dark Powers Gathering

In John 14:30–31 Jesus told his disciples on the night of his betrayal, 'I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father'. He was saying that Satan was coming, doubtless attended by all his powers. That the powers were present at the Cross is seen in Colossians 2:14–15 where Jesus is said to have defeated them by bearing the judgement of the law against men. Likewise, in Hebrews 2:14–15, Satan is said to be present, for it was through death that Jesus was to overcome him.

What did Jesus mean by saying, 'He has no power over me'? The answer would appear to lie in Jude 9 where Michael and the devil were contending about the body of Moses. The import appears to be that Moses' body being that of a sinner, was in the hands of the angel of death—the devil. This was because Satan has power over those who have guilt, doubtless in his role as accuser. Revelation 12:10 depicts Satan as having power because of accusation (i.e. human guilt), but the Cross destroys such guilt and Satan's power is lost. Thus we understand that in John 14:30–31 Jesus is saying that the devil is out to destroy him, that he has no grounds for such destruction, since Jesus is innocent, yet Jesus was to take the guilt of the world on him, thus giving Satan some sort of destroying power over him.

Judas at that time—the time of the Last Supper—was proving to be Satan's pawn, for 'the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him', and during the supper 'Satan entered into him'. Jesus had said of Judas, 'Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?' (John 6:70).

In John 8:44 Jesus had said to the Jews, 'You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning'. Well, then, that devilish father was gathering the forces of Jewish self-righteous persons, the Sadducean materialists, and other workers of iniquity, and they were all setting themselves to kill him. This is clear from John 11:53, 'So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death'.

The early church saw this plot as the fulfilment of Psalm 2. In fact they were sure that the plan to destroy

Jesus was not accidental but a cosmic conspiracy:

'Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples imagine vain things?
The kings of the earth set themselves in array,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—
for truly in this city there were gathered together against thy holy
servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate,
with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, *to do whatever thy hand and
thy plan had predestined to take place* (Acts 4:25-28; Ps. 2:1-2).

The scene, then, is that Satan and his hosts, the leaders of the nations and the nations themselves, are all represented and are determined to destroy Jesus in Jerusalem.

As Jesus was apprehended in the garden—though without guilt of sinning—he told his enemies, '*But this is your hour and the power [authority] of darkness*'. It is clear, then, that the hosts of hell had gathered against the Holy One, Jesus the Christ, and were out to destroy him.

We may well call this the pinnacle happening of the clash of the two kingdoms.

God had Planned the Gathering and Conflict

Genesis 3:15 had warned the serpent—Satan—that he would one day be crushed under the seed of the woman. This 'Bruiser' would himself be bruised but not fatally. Isaiah 52:14—53:12 speaks of the Suffering Servant who was to be horribly mutilated and suffer deeply, but also to bring victory from his suffering. Hence in Acts 2:22-23 Peter teaches that 'this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you

crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men'. Like-wise, in Acts 4:28 the church sees the crucifixion as pre-planned, i.e. 'to do whatever thy hand and thy plan had predestined to take place'. Judas, then, was also pre-destined to betray Christ, thus being the instrument of Satan, but unwittingly the servant of God.

That God had planned the conflict means it was no terrible error, no regrettable slip, no horrible misjudgement. This clash had to take place, the powers of darkness using their method of power and cruelty, and the King his power of weakness, for 'he was crucified through weakness'.

The Cross and the Clash of the Kingdoms

Whilst we are thinking in terms of the clash of the kingdoms, yet we must also keep in mind that it was more than that. It was the great hour of God's love, the hour of God's great love. So many Scriptures assure us of that. Yet it is not until we see the battle Christ fought for us with the assistance of the Father and the Spirit, that we are able to recognize the full love of God.

The Power of Weakness and Submission

Recognizing that it was the hour—i.e. the *kairos*—of darkness, just as it was even more his own *kairos*, Jesus submitted to the authorities that judged him, though not in a servile manner. His dignity was unruffled. Peter states the principle left to us, 'He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not

revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly'. This 'weakness principle' (cf. II Cor. 13:4, 'he was crucified through weakness') is found in the chapter from which Peter quotes, namely Isaiah 53. It is expressed through the passage but mainly in verse 7, 'He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth'. If we are not careful we will miss this principle by which he fought and conquered the kingdom of darkness. He was strong only in being weak, for his will was submitted. This was to be baffling to the powers of darkness.

The Attacks of Evil Powers

Colossians 2:14–15 informs us that Christ 'cancelled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross'. Some see the bond as the record of our law-breaking, some as the accusations of the principalities and powers written against us both as human failures, and practitioners of sins. Whatever it was—whether it be called 'the curse', 'the sins' or 'sin' (as a whole), Christ both bore them all, and even became them, for Paul said, '[God] made him to be sin, for us'.

Whatever our conclusion may be, we see that the evil powers were there to accuse and to raise the evil deeds of man for God to see, and to condemn. It was as though evil saw some predicament God was faced with. God loved His world, but He must punish—even destroy it. How could He save it? By some sophistry, some

casuistic escape clause, some embezzlement of His great holiness? No! He must Himself bear the sins of the world. That was what God was doing in Christ. Satan and his hosts, the world, the flesh, and all evil were pressing up against the Holy One of God.

We use words and phrases but what do they mean? What do they convey? What do we read, sense and understand? Little I would think, until we know what it is to be crucified with Christ, and that must be a revelation, and not just a mystical experience.

Evil and the Messianic Psalms

The Psalms are human. The Psalms are the expression of man's affection, his sorrows and joys, his passions and his suffering. Mere 'proofs' will not convince us that some Psalms are Messianic and some not. Psalm 22 has long been accorded Messianic reality by the church. Even so, the cry of dereliction with which it opens is quickly understood, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'. It is seen as coming from Christ on the Cross, as also from David in some time of deep misery.

The psalm depicts the subject of the crying as under great stress, for he says:

Be not far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is none to help.

Many bulls encompass me,
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and roaring lion.

We can see Christ pressed by the foul creatures of the kingdom of darkness. They are heavy: they are cruel. Their wild staring eyes glare, as they plunge for the deadly thrust and parry, the kill itself. Their horns would impale him. Their hot fetid breath is upon him, as they open wide their mouths at him. Now his weakness is beyond bearing; he has no de-fence:

I am poured out like water,
 and all my bones are out of joint;
 my heart is like wax,
 it is melted within my breast;
 my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
 and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
 thou dost lay me in the dust of death.

Yet this is not the end; more is to come:

Yea, dogs are round about me;
 a company of evildoers encircle me;
 they have pierced my hands and feet—
 I can count all my bones—
 they stare and gloat over me;
 they divide my garments among them,
 and for my raiment they cast lots.

The Anguish of Enmity

In his ministry amongst his people, Jesus met with the rich love of his own—the disciples, the grateful women, those liberated from sickness, demonic oppression and heavy guilt. What must have been distressing was the growing opposition and the mounting anger, bitterness and hatred. Enmity is deeply painful to all of the human race.

Expectancy of love by reason of creation is the one-ness of the human *corpus*. Human bewilderment, disillusionment, and hard cynicism result as Cain murders Abel, as rape, patricide, fratricide, homicide and genocide flare out of control. Love is the birthright of created man but he takes to the grave ‘man’s inhumanity to man’, a heart inflamed with hurt and sorrow.

Jesus so often referred to the fierce reaction the disciples would suffer because of their love to God. The world will hate them, as it hated him—*without a cause!* To have that huge dark system of evil come against him as he hung helplessly upon the Cross, belching out their hatred and bitterness was not merely frightening, but soul destroying.

Psalm 69 is listed amongst the Messianic Psalms for its 21st verse says, ‘and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink’.

There are sad passages in it when the psalmist cries out in his loneliness. He is beset by enemies and is at the mercy of those who will show no mercy:

More in number than the hairs of my head
 are those who hate me without cause;
 mighty are those who would destroy me,
 those who attack me with lies.
 What I did not steal
 must I now restore?

For zeal for thy house has consumed me,
 and the insults of those who insult
 thee have fallen on me.

With thy faithful help rescue me
 from sinking in the mire;

let me be delivered from my enemies
and from the deep waters.
Let not the flood sweep over me,
or the deep swallow me up,
or the pit close its mouth over me.

These are the cries of a man bereft of all human comfort, able only to cry to God, and even then deliverance seems impossible. The appeals are frightening, showing the power of hatred and enmity. More is to come:

Thou knowest my reproach,
and my shame and my dishonour;
my foes are all known to thee.
Insults have broken my heart,
so that I am in despair.
I looked for pity, but there was none;
and for comforters, but I found none.
They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me
vinegar to drink.

How powerfully J. Heermann writes of the hatred of man—Christ's bitter enemy in the hour of need for genuine pity:

Ah, holy Jesus,
How hast thou offended,
That man to judge Thee, hath in hate pretended?
By foes derided, by thine own rejected,
O most afflicted.

Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon Thee?
Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone Thee;
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied Thee:
I crucified Thee.

For me, kind Jesus, was thy incarnation,
Thy mortal sorrow, and thy life's oblation;
Thy death of anguish and thy bitter passion,
For my salvation.

When it was said, 'He has borne [their] griefs and carried [their] sorrows', this was to show that all the griefs and sorrows of the human race, whether self-inflicted or inflicted by others, were the pain and shame that he entered into—that very limbo of the unloved, the hated and neglected of the human *corpus*. We must see this as the mode and method of defeating darkness—Christ's total and painful identification with every sin and sorrow of the human race. So evil sought to cauterize his spirit and make him numb and void of all that we call feeling and all that we call hope.

The Nature of God's Wrath and the Sin-Suffering of Man

All of the above—the accusation of evil powers, the rising crystallization of the inner human guilt, the released passions of anger and hatred—both from ourselves and others—we will not understand unless we understand the nature of our sinfulness, and our sins. No one understands the nature of sin, for he cried from the Cross, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do'. No one understands sin or the deceitful and corrupt heart of the sinner. Only God knows the dreadful depths of human depravity. When, then, Jesus becomes 'the body of sin', i.e. 'the old humanity [i.e. Adam]', and when he bears our sins in his body on the tree (I Pet. 2:24), and when he is made to be sin for us (II Cor. 5:21), then he becomes

the plaything of the evil legalists, the principalities and powers that accuse man and mock him in his failure, and for them there is no answer: that is without bearing the sins, becoming as a hissing deadly serpent on a pole, as the filth of all history on a cross, as the writhing cursed thing on a tree.

Our theology of the Atonement may have betrayed us in setting out the theory of God's action, but ignoring, existentially, the person of the sinner, and the person of Christ the Sufferer. The prophet cried (Lam. 1:12):

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
 Look and see
 if there is any sorrow like my sorrow
 which was brought upon me,
 which the Lord inflicted
on the day of his fierce anger.

Initially this painful cry may have been Jeremiah's, and especially in regard to his people and the besieged and ravished city of Jerusalem, but the gospeller deliberately records, 'And those *who passed by* derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who would de-stroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God come down from the cross" '. Christ's death was nothing to them, and they did not recognize that he hung under the full pain of the deadly curse. The wrath of God was upon him, for he had been predestined to be the propitiation of our sins. No one could understand God's 'day of his fierce anger'.

This wrath is portrayed in Psalm 38:1–10. It needs to be studied in depth. Its principle is found in Romans 1:18–28, that whilst God's wrath is not sin, yet sin is

God's wrath, i.e. the terrible elements of guilt are what destroy a man, keep him in emotional pain, as dread and alienation, anger and confusion, pollution and loneliness, heaviness and dislocation invade every part of him. As man sins so he grows in guilt, and growing in guilt continually compounds his sin. God's wrath is that He abandons man to that sin (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; Isa. 59:2; 64:7). We read part of Psalm 38 in order to understand the suffering of Jesus as he was 'abandoned up' to sin and to death (Rom. 8:34; Gal. 2:20)—the very wrath of God:

O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger,
 nor chasten me in thy wrath!
 For thy arrows have sunk into me,
 and thy hand has come down on me.

There is no soundness in my flesh
 because of thy indignation;
 there is no health in my bones
 because of my sin.
 For my iniquities have gone over my head;
 they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.

This is something of what Christ bore as unremitting accusation was hurled from the minds of evil powers. Yet it was more than this. It was the naked soul thrust against the utter holiness of God. The searing purity of God brings the deepest pain of all to the human creature. Mercifully man is protected from it, but he fears the hour when that provisional mercy will end and he will face God. In the midst of all his self-saving activities, his compulsive attempts to secure himself, and his thin endeavours to create self-pleasure and self-assurance, is

the sickening inner dread of the judgement, and of the great white throne before which all heaven and earth flee away, so intensely holy is the One upon that throne, so much the eyes of the Lamb are flames of fire, searing into the soul. For Jesus to 'be made sin for us'—he who knew no sin—and to offer himself without blemish to God must have been pain and shame of the most excruciating nature. To be given up to the wild excursions of sin, to the frightening incursions of death upon his spirit, and vile mockery of all that is evil, are things he suffered which are beyond our reckoning. We can but stand helpless before his cross and be spectators to these horrors.

For darkness and evil in their personalized presence there—at the Cross—must have been a terrible matter. Even as they struggled to destroy him, his powerful passivity, his frightening refusal to use one of their weapons must have struck terror into their hearts. In return they had no weapon which could destroy him, but his un-impaired holiness—in spite of his being made sin—must have been a high horror to them. As his act of propitiation was the will and action commanded by the Father and obeyed by the Son—with the assistance given by the Spirit—Satan and his bully-boys must have gone whimpering into their lairs, defeated, licking their wounds and shattered. By his act of atonement he had defeated the kingdom of darkness and sealed their ultimate doom. Hence Mrs Cousin's great hymn:

He plunged in his imperial strength
To gulfs of darkness down.
He brought his trophy up at length,
The foiled usurper's crown.

The Cry of Dereliction

When he cried, 'I thirst!', it was because the entirety of his resources had been drained in the conflict. One-handed he had taken on the entire kingdom of evil. The oceans of his love were the waters which enabled him to endure in that dry and thirsty land where no water was, and these he had used to effect his titanic task and victory. In the desolate place, the fearful and lonely limbo of the lost, he had moved in darkness which man but senses yet dreads beyond all other things. 'My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?' is the cry that carries the realized doom of the human spirit. There is no horror like unto that horror, and man seeks to close his ears against it. It is the hardest of all the sayings of Christ.

It is grace itself that this cry has burst into the human scene and been borne in upon human hearing, else we would never know the ultimate in wrath, and so the ultimate in mercy. God had abandoned him up (Rom. 8:32; cf. Isa. 64:7), and so had he abandoned himself up simultaneously though with dread (Gal. 2:20). There in the dry and lonely land, in the thickest and most dreadful of all darkness, he drank the cup of wrath to its most bitter dregs. That was why he thirsted intolerably.

That was why he cried, 'Tetelestai!', 'It is finished!'. It was a loud triumphant cry, one that had defeated all darkness, liberated the elect, and brought brilliant revelation to us of the love of the Eternal Father, His beloved Son, and the Spirit in whom move the vast and roaring oceans of Divine love, and by whom that love is poured into the redeemed heart.

The Cry of Triumph

The cry, 'It is finished!', meant that the battle was over, and the war was won. The clash of the kingdoms was consummated. Satan's weapon—the fear of death—was wrenched from his hand. Henceforth there would be no legitimate grounds for accusation from the evil powers or even from a person's own conscience. The shame of pollution was also dissolved for that cry meant Christ's work of redemption was finished. It would henceforth be for a person's faith to receive and live in this grace.

No less triumphant was Jesus' last saying, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!'. As we shall see, he had no fear of death, and only full anticipation of life.

CHAPTER SIX***God and His Eternal Kingdom—V******Christ and His Eternal Victory—III: The Power of His Death*****Christ's Confidence in His Death**

Jesus never feared death. This—on the one hand—was because God had given to the Son to have life in himself (John 5:26), and whatever this means in regard to the mortality of his humanity, the fact was known to him. That he, as the eternal Son of God, had and has life in

himself is not in question. What may be in question was his being as man, but the assurance that even here he had life in himself was of great importance to him as he faced the death of the Cross. On the other hand Jesus did not fear death because he had never known the guilt of sin. Nor could he have known such. It is clear from I Corinthians 15:55–56, Romans 6:23 and other passages, that the sting and horror of death is—as has been said—‘Man is not afraid of death because he has to die, but because *he deserves to die*’. Really, it is the judgement which troubles him, and only the Cross can take away that trouble.

On both these counts Jesus understood himself to be inviolate from the depredations of death as fallen man knows them. On the night of his betrayal he had told his disciples, ‘I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power [authority] to lay it down, and I have power [authority] to take it again’ (John 10:17–18). Nothing, and no one in all creation, could take his life from him.

There is a human sense in which no one takes another’s life. Doubtless a person can kill another person’s body, but not his life. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as suicide, for a man may kill his own body, but not his own existence. Likewise in life human beings can give up their life but retain their personhood in whatever form it may exist after physical death. Many have been known to die from despair or bitter cynicism. Others have given up their life voluntarily for what they deemed to be good.

Jesus had once said, ‘The bread which I shall give for

the life of the world is my flesh’. On his own authority he had given up his life. His last cry, ‘Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit’, was a loud cry. It was therefore one of triumph. Prior to that act he had always known he was to die. This is seen in the three predictions of his crucifixion that he had given to his disciples (cf. Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32–33).

The Confident Committal

When we examine Christ’s last utterance, ‘Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit’, then we recognize that it is from Psalm 31:5, ‘Into thy hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God’. The text of the first five verses of the Psalm need to be examined closely:

In thee, O Lord, do I seek refuge;
 let me never be put to shame;
 in thy righteousness deliver me!
 Incline thy ear to me,
 rescue me speedily!
 Be thou a rock of refuge for me,
 a strong fortress to save me!
 Yea, thou art my rock and my fortress;
 for thy name’s sake lead me and guide me,
 take me out of the net which is hidden for me,
 for thou art my refuge.
 Into thy hand I commit my spirit;
 thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

Having sensed something of the powerful battle between the two kingdoms as the conflict centred on and around the Cross, we can realize that Jesus knew he was

now beyond this conflict, having resolved it in his 'weak-ness'. The Lion of Judah was the slain Lamb, but powerful because of that. Many times he had spoken of going back to the Father. The love between the Father and the Son is inexpressible; to have glorified the Father in this painful but effective way must have made his death a thing of beauty, of achievement, of release, and of full reunion with His Father.

The Necessity of His Death

On the Mount of Transfiguration Moses and Elijah had discussed with him 'his death [Gk: *exodus*] which he was to *accomplish* at Jerusalem', so that its dynamic nature was put forth for the disciples. He was to be the new Moses leading his people from the death of Egypt (the world) out to the life of freedom. The death was not to be a tragedy but God's triumph for His elect, His (New) Covenant people. Thus it was not only the bonding blood that was essential (cf. Matt. 26:28; Heb. 9:14, 22; 10:19–22), but unless he went through death he would not have been tempted (tested) in all points as are we. He must enter into death to bring us up out of it. This is implied in Hebrews 13:20, 'Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the eternal covenant . . .' Whilst this refers more to his resurrection than his death, yet it speaks of death with a view to resurrection, and this not only for himself but for his true people, the flock of God. Of course the Atonement could not have been completed simply by blood which he shed, but by blood which was shed in violent sacrifice.

Christ's Experience of Death

The early church quoted Psalm 16 both in reference to his state of death and his resurrection (Acts 2:25–28; 13:36; Ps. 16:8–11). At Pentecost Peter said (Acts 2:24–28), 'But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it'. What is meant by 'the pangs of death'? Is this the equivalent to Paul's 'sting of death'? Whatever the answer, it is certain that Jesus did not suffer death as a force of corruption, or a power which dominated him.

In I Peter 3:18–19 the apostle wrote, 'For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, *being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit*, in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison'. It seems clear that his flesh was killed but not he. In fact his death was the springboard of his quickening in the grave, and his resurrection out of it. John Owen's title to one of his books is apt, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. Christ had killed death before he died and so was its Lord.

The *process* of his death in the grave was not deathful, i.e. he never saw corruption as such. Psalm 16:9–10 says this clearly. This is quite remarkable. I Peter 3:19 would appear to state that at the time in the grave he went and *preached*—i.e. proclaimed his victory over Satan and his system—to the spirits in prison, whoever they may have been (cf. II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). If, then, his body did not see corruption, he cannot have died in the way we do. This does not mean his death was not *human*, but that it was the kind of death which was *truly human*, so that it was a sign and proof to the powers of darkness that they

had been defeated in the Cross, Death and Resurrection of Messiah the Son of Man.

Conclusion as to the Victory of His Death

In Romans chapter 6 Paul told us that it was by baptism into Christ that we were baptized into his death, i.e. that corporately our old (Adamic) humanity was taken up into his cross. Personally too, we were crucified with him (Gal. 2:20). In any case we have participated in his death and such participation was both corporate—all humanity—and personal. The 'I' of each was crucified, died and was buried. When we speak about his death as being the action of crucifixion, the work within that crucifixion, and then the descent into death, as well as the being dead, then the victory of that death is that the guilt of sin was taken away, the moral pollution was cleansed, and the person being crucified was justified. The guilt of sin being taken away, the defeat of Satan and his *aeon* was achieved. The particular aspects of that death are discussed above. Pertinent is that fact that the 'fear of death' was destroyed (cf. Heb. 2:14–15; I John 4:16–18). Death itself was shown by Christ to have no power over him, and so none over his people, since the sting or barb of death had been removed.

All this having been said, it is that death would have had no validity or reality if Christ had not risen. Hence the need to talk about 'the power of his resurrection'.

CHAPTER SEVEN

***God and His Eternal
Kingdom—VI***

***Christ and His Eternal Victory—IV:
The Power and Victory of His Resurrection***

The Father's Attestation by the Resurrection

Before his death and following his resurrection Jesus had affirmed the necessity not only of his death, but also of his resurrection. This is seen in the three Markan statements (8:31; 9:31; 10:33). In Luke 24:25 he asked his

disciples, 'Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?', and in 24:45–47 he revealed that Christ should suffer, rise from the dead, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all the nations. In almost identical words Paul later preaches the Gospel at Thessalonica, 'explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead' (Acts 17:3).

At Pentecost Peter showed that the death of the Cross was God's pre-planned event, and no regrettable mistake. The proof of this was that God raised him from the dead thus attesting (a) to the value of the Cross, (b) to the true work of the Cross by His Son, and (c) to the rightness of the Son himself. The Resurrection showed that God did not abandon him *to* death, for however much he may have abandoned him *up* to death, Christ was not abandoned *in* death. This thought is repeated in Acts 3:15, 'You . . . killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead'; Acts 4:10, 'Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead'; 10:39, 'They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day'. Certainly God attests Jesus. This is seen in Romans 1:4 where Jesus is 'designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead'.

The Work of the Cross Also Attested by the Resurrection

Even so, it is not only Jesus who is attested, but his work of the Cross. Without the Resurrection it is of no value. To defeat sin but to die without resurrection has no point.

Thus we cannot talk about two works, (a) the work of the Cross, and (b) the work of Resurrection. They are of the one piece. This is borne out by Romans 4:25, 'Jesus our Lord who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification'. Forgiveness and justification are in the one bundle so that the verse is a parallelism.

Resurrection and the Cross Inseparable

The *kerygma* or Gospel proclamation of the church contained amongst other things the work of the Cross and the Resurrection as being the one thing. Hebrew thinking would see the Resurrection as more than being brought back to human life. It was an advance into the realm of eternal life. One who rises from death is stronger than death, therefore is stronger than sin, and so has 'the keys of Death and of Hades'. One who rises not only has power over death, but over life. A resuscitated person—such as Lazarus—would eventually die, again, but Jesus—never! A Lazarus person could never forgive sins, but in I Corinthians 15:3–4 (cf. Acts 17:3) Christ is said to have died for our sins, and to have been raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

This is also the thrust of Paul in I Corinthians 15:17, 'If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins'.

Resurrection and the Victory of the Kingdom of God

- (a) If the Cross event does not accomplish salvation, then Satan is not defeated, and his kingdom is still intact.

The Cross–Resurrection event has achieved salvation, for it has destroyed the power of sin in that it has cleared the guilt of man. That is why believers overcame the dragon by the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and loved not their lives unto death (Rev. 12:9–11). Because of the Resurrection there is no death for the believer (John 4:25; 5:28; 6:40, 44, 54; 11:25). They could testify to Christ who himself had conquered the dragon, so that they now had no fear of death.

- (b) The Cross–Resurrection event defeated Satan and his kingdom because Jesus—as man—was proclaimed ‘both Lord and Christ’ (Acts 2:36; 10:36), meaning he was now ‘the ruler of kings on earth’, and ‘King of kings and Lord of lords’ (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). His Lordship arises from, and is attested to by his resurrection, which is also the basis of salvation, ‘If you will confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved’ (Rom. 10:9). Where Christ is ‘Lord over all the lords’ he has—in practice—defeated the lords which hitherto defeated us. He also continues to defeat them as they again seek to bring us into bondage.
- (c) The Cross–Resurrection event defeated Satan, because it brought both our reconciliation with God and the fullness of salvation, ‘For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God *by the death* of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled shall we be saved *by his life*’ (Rom. 5:10; cf. Gal. 2:20).

This, of course, has more to it than *the act* of resurrection, for it includes the dynamics of his present operative life.

- (d) The Cross–Resurrection event defeated Satan, for whilst ‘flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God’, the mark of glorified flesh (Phil. 3:21) is that it has inherited the Kingdom of God. On the one hand Satan cannot prevent the entrance of the elect into God’s Kingdom, and on the other he cannot effect immortality or a ‘continuing kingdom’ for his own ‘elect’.
- (e) The Cross–Resurrection event defeated Satan because God’s people live by the presence and power of their risen Lord. They are assisted in the life of holiness by the defeat of sin’s power (Rom. ch. 6; Col. 3:1–15; Eph. 4:17–31) and hence Satan’s power, and their Lord crushes Satan beneath their feet (Rom. 16:20; I John 4:4; 5:4).

Conclusion to the Victory of Christ Over Satan Through His Resurrection

Doubtless there are many other ways we could speak of the victory of Christ over Satan as he—Christ—has effected forever the victory of the Cross and Resurrection. We can see clearly that through the Atonement Christ ‘destroyed the works of the devil’. The Cross had to be one with the Resurrection. The resurrection to life and authority of Jesus so that he became Lord in his humanity, meant that Satan could no longer touch him.

We now need to see how by his Ascension he seals forever the doom of the kingdom of darkness and the triumph of the Kingdom of God.

CHAPTER EIGHT

***God and His Eternal
Kingdom—VII***

***Christ and His Eternal Victory—V:
The Ascension, Exaltation
and Session of Christ***

The Fact of the Ascension and Exaltation

The Gospels, Acts, Epistles and the Revelation all speak of Christ's Ascension. The Cross without the Resurrection is unthinkable. So is the Resurrection without the Ascension. He is Lord by reason of his Resurrection (cf. Acts 2:36; 10:36; Rom. 10:9), but his Lordship would be

unacceptable without his Ascension. This Ascension—as a fact in history—is spoken of in Acts 1:4–11, Luke 24:24–51 and Mark 16:19. Other allusions to it are found in John 6:62; Acts 2:32–33; 3:21; Ephesians 4:8–10; I Thessalonians 1:10; Hebrews 4:14; 9:24; I Peter 3:22; and Revelation 5:6.

Some see a difference between the terms *ascension* and *exaltation*. Ascension would appear to be what Christ does—he ascends—and in some sense does this under his own power. We find in his Resurrection that on the one hand he was raised by God and on the other that he himself rose. Likewise there was something about the power of Christ which raised him—the Ascension—and yet this could not be unless he was raised by God—the exaltation. Thus exaltation was something God did—He exalted him. On the other hand it seems Christ rose to the heavens. This exaltation by God, however, was not merely a lifting of Christ to the heavens, but lifting him to the highest place of all both in priority and pre-eminence. Again, Christ rose to this place. Of course the two may well be the one.

The Nature of the ‘Aboveness’

Those who hold that the Hebrews held a three-tiered view of heaven, earth and hell, must allow for the fact that space—as they knew it—also symbolized states or conditions. We still say—in this so-called scientific age—that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, but do not mean that at all. Likewise heaven (literally ‘the heavens’) can be spoken of as that ‘aboveness’ which

transcends ‘belowness’. It can be a statement of status or transcendent living, just as below can be a statement of different status and living.

For this reason some do not see Christ’s ascending as meaning he moved spatially into the atmosphere or stratosphere, any more than they would think of him—having ascended—as sitting upon a throne located in space. Acts 1:9 says, ‘And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight’. Was the cloud, then, a meteorological cloud or ‘a cloud of glory’, i.e. the Shekinah cloud? Did it equal Christ’s being ‘seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven’ (Matt. 26:64; Dan. 7:13) so that just as a cloud received him out of their sight it will one day reveal him to their sight, i.e. at his second coming?

The Significance of the Ascension and Exaltation

In his earthly ministry, Jesus made much of the fact that he had been *sent* by the Father, for this sending testified to the genuineness of his ministry, as well as indicated its power. Part of the testimony of the Father was not only that He had sent the Son (mentioned some 40 times in John’s Gospel) but would receive him back (John 6:62). For example, he told his disciples that the Holy Spirit would testify to (his) righteousness because he would go to the Father (John 16:7–11; 14:1–6). For the Father to receive him testified to his—Jesus’—righteousness. In Acts 2:33–34 Peter said, ‘Being therefore exalted at the

right hand of God', quoting in support of Psalm 110:1, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool" '. In Acts 3:20, 21 Peter added, 'the Christ . . . whom the heavens must receive until the time for establishing all . . .' In Hebrews 1:3 the writer said, 'When he had made purification for sins he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high', adding in 10:12, 'But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet'.

There are a number of elements which are significant in his exaltation. The primary element is that by his exaltation he is pronounced Lord, and as Lord he rules over all things, working to bring God's history to its true conclusion (I Cor. 15:24–28). With that ruling is also his intercession for his people, and that intercession is part of the outworking of God's plan. At the same time he is preparing a place for his saints, and will receive them to himself. What, however, concerns us particularly, is the relationship to the clash of the kingdoms, and this we will now examine.

The Victory and Action of Christ's Ascension in the Battle of the Kingdoms

Christ is the Son Welcomed Back to the Father and Acclaimed as His Unique Son

In John 14:1–10 and 17:1–5, 22–26, Jesus speaks of returning to the Father. Hebrews 1:3–13 speaks of him

being exalted, i.e. returned to the throne from which he had created all things, and thus it being made manifest that he is uniquely the Son of God. Such a Son—who has both created and redeemed the world—is not merely another angel or the highest of all angels, but truly the Son who is to be worshipped by angels. The Messianic Psalm 45 is quoted, especially verses 6 and 7. Likewise the Psalm of the King—Psalm 110—is quoted of him, and also the other Psalm of the King, namely Psalm 2. The great Davidic promise of II Samuel 7:14 is also applied to him. This plethora of Messianic texts is intended to make us see that Jesus—as no one else—has authority and function, and must be looked to as next to God the Father in the order of creation and redemption. The support of such texts should not merely prove a point, but be the source of worship and thanksgiving.

Christ Works from Given Authority

Immediately prior to his ascension come Christ's famous words, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations' (Matt. 28:18–20). Whilst the authority was his prior to the Ascension, it was active and functional in the Ascension, in what we call his session (seated and reigning) at the right hand of God. In the Markan fragment (16:14–20) the same principle obtains, but it is stated more clearly, 'So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God'.

In other words, the one who was 'crucified through weakness' does not merely emerge victorious *in spite of*

the Cross but *because of the Cross*. The terrible power of evil—the cyclone of hatred, the whirlwind of bitterness, and the storm of venom—dies to emptiness and is wholly non-effectual. The triumph of holiness and love defies all the armies of the dark kingdom and emerges unscathed. Suddenly the Victor is in the heavens. He escapes the scourge of death by killing it. He proclaims the reality of life through love and holiness, and the demise of evil's power is revealed. Satan, who has sought feverishly through power politics, coercion and threats, deception and seduction, is shown to have no genuine power.

Christ's Throne is Above All

There above all, the Son reigns through 'the im-measurable greatness of his [God's] power'. God has 'raised him from the dead and *made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places*, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age [*aeon*] but also in that which is to come; *and he has put all things under his feet* and has made him the head over all things for the church'.

When Satan—who aims to set his throne above the stars of God, and to give himself out that he is God and must be worshipped as God in the temple (Isa. 14:12–14; II Thess. 2:4)—looks up, he sees the 'weak' Son now in marvellous strength, and knows with sickening certainty that this man-child he had tried to devour when the Woman brought him forth, has been caught up to the throne and is 'the one who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron' (Rev. 12:5). This is the one who can say

to his followers, 'He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father' (Rev. 2:26–27). The old dragon then knows that the Father and Son have spawned a people of weakness who are terrible in power. One word from them and the devil will flee in terror (James 4:7; I Pet. 5:8–9; I John 2:12).

Psalm 2:8–11 and Psalm 110:1 are Being Worked Out in History

The whole idea of the Lamb upon the throne at the right hand of God stems from Psalm 110:1, 'The Lord says to my lord, "Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool" '. These enemies will bow their heads to the dust, the Conqueror will place his feet upon them—the vanquished. Someone has counted 27 references to this verse in the New Testament. Certainly it is strongly significant. It means that Christ is Victor, and that now—having destroyed (paralysed; put out of action) Satan through the Atonement, is thus occupied—between Pentecost and the Parousia—in the mopping up operations until the fiery lake shall cover the dark kingdom and its inhabitants for ever.

At least two passages speak of Christ's enemies being subjugated under his feet—I Corinthians 15:24–28 and Hebrews 10:12. Hebrews 1:3 is virtually parallel to 10:12, 'He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high', 'he sat down at the right hand of God then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet'.

I Corinthians 15:24–26 says, ‘Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death’.

The sum of this is that Christ’s ascension and exaltation have given him the victory over all evil, and he persists in drawing the net around his opponents ultimately bringing them to death. In the Cross he initially ‘destroyed the works of the devil’. In the interim between Pentecost and the Parousia he is sealing the final doom of the dark kingdom.

The Power of Intercession

In all of this battle we must not forget the people of God, Christ’s church and God’s elect. We saw back in Luke 4:18–19 (cf. Isa. 61:1–2)—in regard to liberation from prison—, Luke 11:14–23—in regard to the Strong Man and the Stronger than the Strong Man—, and Acts 10:38—in Christ freeing his people from Satanic oppression—, that the Atonement was appointed to effect this liberation. What however, of the kingdom of dark-ness and its unremitting attack upon the people of God following the Cross, the Resurrection, and Ascension?

In answer a number of things are clear. The first is that Satan’s power having been broken, Christ’s people must abide in Christ, and be kept by him—a principle we will later examine in detail. Secondly, Pentecost raised up ‘a mighty host’ in accordance with Ezekiel 37—another point we will also examine in detail. Thirdly, Christ inter-cedes for his people.

Christ undoubtedly interceded for his disciples, in choosing them and encouraging them as they followed him. He prayed for Peter that he might not be destroyed by the shock of his own denial of Jesus. Most beautifully he prayed for the apostles on the night of his betrayal as we read in John chapter 17. He prayed that they might be kept from the world, i.e. from the prince of the world, the powers of evil, and hostile men and women. He prayed that they might be kept in unity, i.e. the apostles and those who heard and believed their word. The effects of this prayer have been spread from that night until now, and will go on until the final climax of history. Such is the power of prayer that we may rest secure in this special high-priestly intercession.

In the Letter to the Hebrews Christ is constantly called the High Priest of the believers. The High Priest, Christ, is of another and higher order than that of the old Levitical priesthood. His powers transcend those of Levi. Hebrews 4:15–16 encourages believers to go to the throne of grace for help in time of need; 7:23–28 gives a rich exposition of a priestly ministry which is able to save. This Priest ever lives to make saving intercession for those in need.

Romans 8:34 tells us that Christ was raised from the dead, is at the right hand of God, and in that place intercedes for us. The passage of Romans 8:28–39 makes it clear that this intercession is not in order to bring us to salvation or salvation to us, for it states that God has already justified us and answers the accusers who call that salvation in question. No, here we must see that the intercession is really intervention against the powers that would destroy us, for the writer goes on to say:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

'For thy sake we are being killed all the day long;

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered'.

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It can be seen from this passage that vast powers are arrayed against the church, seeking to destroy the elect, but Christ at the right hand of God is praying for us. He intervenes—via the Father—against hostile powers. A close study of Isaiah 59—especially with verses 9–15 as a basis for seeing the evil that is about mankind—shows us that God views such evil with anger. He then becomes the Intervener and acts out His judgement. Verses 15–19 describe the action of the Great Intercessor. We must therefore see that Christ at the right hand of God is this very One who intervenes.

Such is the power of his intercession that all the endeavours of evil powers are thwarted. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. The Ascension and exaltation have had this reason and goal in mind. Christ still battles the kingdom of darkness which would destroy the children of light, and he succeeds in his intercession.

CHAPTER NINE

God and His Eternal Kingdom—VIII

Christ and His Eternal Victory—VI: Christ's Present Session and His Final Victory

Christ's Session

(in the light of Ps. 2; Gen. 49:10; Ps. 89; Isa. 9:6–7; 65:17–19; Rev. 2:27; 3:21; and many other Scriptures; cf. Luke 24:27, 44–47)

The clash of the kingdoms must result in the ultimate of the defeat of the kingdom of evil. The decisive blow in

the Cross–Resurrection–Ascension work of Christ was such as ‘to destroy the works of the devil’, and Hebrews 2:14–15 states ‘that he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage’. Here the verb ‘destroy’ (*katargeo*) does not necessarily mean to totally annihilate, but carries the ideas of ‘render ineffective’, ‘paralyse’, ‘put out of action’, ‘make void’, ‘abolish’, and ‘bring to nothing’ (cf. Rom. 3:31; 6:6; I Cor. 2:6; 15:24, 26; II Tim. 1:10).

It means, then, that Satan is not annihilated by the Atonement, but is rendered ineffective by the abolition of human guilt. In history, Satan, his forces and his kingdom still exist, but the removal of human guilt renders them powerless in the face of God’s grace and man’s responsive faith (cf. James 4:7; I Pet. 5:8–9; I John 2:12–14; 4:4; 5:4; Rev. 12:11).

The goal for Messiah as stated in the Scriptures named in our heading immediately above, is to be achieved by Messiah in this age, that is, the time between Pentecost and Christ’s Parousia. This goal is to inherit the earth by winning the nations to his (Christ’s) obedience, as also to judge those who oppose him and his Father. This means that in this period of time Satan is finally pursued and defeated. His defeat in this period of time issues from the power of Christ’s Atonement.

The Present Action of Messiah

I Corinthians 15:24–28 describes the action of Christ from Pentecost to the Parousia. Raised from the dead by

the power of God he is now in the place of kingship, above all powers, including the heavenly powers—many of which are Satan’s lords and princes. Christ uses his kingship to put down all rule and authority and power which is hostile to him. The final enemy to be destroyed will be death, and having put all enemies under his feet (I Cor. 15:24–28; Heb. 2:8; 10:12–13), the Son will give the Kingdom to the Father (cf. Rev. 11:15).

The Church and the Present Action of Christ

Ephesians 1:22–23 indicates that the church has been given the fullness of Christ. By his fullness Christ is ‘filling all in all’, i.e. giving to it true content, and so filling up what had become vain and empty. Acts 1:8 assures the apostolic band that they will proclaim the Kingdom of God in all places and to all peoples, for ‘the ends of the earth’ (cf. Ps. 2:6–7) belong to Christ by reason of his atonement work and victory. Indeed the sharp sword that goes out of his mouth—the word of the Gospel—is that which will smite the nations (Rev. 19:15), yet the use of this word is by means of the church which proclaims this Gospel (Matt. 28:20; Luke 24:47; cf. Acts 26:18).

The church, then, participates in the present action of Christ by leadership of the Spirit, and by use of the gifts, fruit and weapons which the Spirit distributes in this militant body (Phil. 1:27–28; cf. Eph. 6:10–18). We conclude that Christ does not work alone, but through his people. Even so, we must not think of the church’s participation in the action of Christ in history as one of her many elements or operations. Indeed the church as the

Bride of Christ is one with him in his entire Messianic programme, and not to share with him in the clash of the kingdoms is to deny one of the primary reasons for her existence.

I Corinthians 15:24–28 and the Revelation of John the Seer

It cannot be stressed too much that the Book of the Revelation is really a description of the outworking of I Corinthians 15:24–28, as also a commentary upon it. Virtually the operations described in the Revelation cover the time from Pentecost to the Parousia. There are sometimes flashes back beyond Pentecost—as in chapter 12 where the birth and Ascension of Messiah is described—and forward—as when the end-time comes, i.e. when the Kingdom comes in fullness, the Son rendering the Kingdom to the Father (cf. Rev. 11:15–18; 12:10; cf. I Cor. 15:24). This must mean that Christ's work in this present age is—so to speak—to apply the victory of the Atonement (i.e. the Death–Resurrection–Ascension event) to the creation in which the kingdom of evil seeks to reign. This being the case, we must keep in mind that what is happening now is the true outworking of the process of history. We must become sensitively aware of this since we too share in the outworking of history. If we are unaware of the present clash of the kingdoms, and the part Messiah and his church must play in it, then we will not understand the great prophecy of the Revelation. It is the key to the programme of I Corinthians 15:24–28. With this key in mind we may now go to the Book of the

Revelation and ponder its message and its exhortations to the church.

The Book of the Revelation and Messiah's Actions

The 1st chapter of the Book sets out for us the matter of true prophecy. John the Seer is given God's revelation of history, which had first been given to Christ. The revelation is prophecy and as such both potent and important. The vision of Christ in chapter 1 reveals the character and purpose of this one who has defeated death. His functional magnificence is shown, and his Lordship over the church described. In chapters 2 and 3 the churches are rebuked and encouraged as is their need, and it is Christ himself who walks amongst the golden candlesticks (1:13; 2:1), i.e. amongst the seven-fold (complete) church. Chapters 4 and 5 are concerned with the worship of the true God for the reasons of creation and redemption.

Chapter 5 is significant because it portrays Messiah as the only one who has the right to open the seven-sealed book. This means that he alone is the true Lord of history, for when he opens the seals he commences the judgements which must come upon the earth (6:1–8:1), especially upon evil men and evil powers. The opening of the seven seals leads to the sounding of the seven trumpets (8:2–11:19), and these also are judgements, though of a more intense nature. Between the sounding of the seventh trumpet (13:1–14:20) there is a period described in which the dragon, the beast and the second

beast seek to establish their kingdom upon the earth, and to defeat the Kingdom of God, but here they are thwarted by God's judgements. Chapters 15 and 16 describe the outpouring of the seven bowls of wrath upon the earth, and even upon heavenly bodies. From these seven seals, trumpets and bowls we can see the outworking of Messiah's victory; he hems in the powers of evil and counteracts their works.

17:1—19:5 depict the nature of the harlot-city Babylon — the counterpart to the Holy City, new Jerusalem—and the destruction of Babylon the great harlot. 19:6–21 describes the wedding of the Bride and the Lamb, and then turns to Christ's conquest of 'the beast' and 'the false prophet' and their followers, all of whom are slain or thrown into the lake of fire. Chapter 20 deals with what has come to be called 'the millennium', and also with the destruction of the devil and his many followers. In chapters 21 and 22 the glorious Holy City is described, and God's people as they are drawn into it, so that they may now see their God and the Lamb—face to face! The Book closes with a warning against taking the prophecy too lightly.

Understanding This Present Time of Conflict

When we read passages such as I Corinthians 15:24–28 and the Book of the Revelation, we may think of the events these passages describe as being far removed from us. We may find it difficult to believe that we are participating in them, for they seem somewhat unreal. This

would be partly because we are reading 'apocalyptic' language—mostly the language of symbolism—and so we may miss the reality of the actual happenings themselves, i.e. those events or processes of history to which the symbols refer. They may appear to be in another world far removed from us and what we call 'practical reality' as though biblical history and all its action is 'up there' and we are 'down here'. This is far from the case, for the Revelation describes—for the most part — what is happening 'down here'. We must endeavour, then, to interpret some of these principles of struggle between the two kingdoms, and even point to those events in which the principles of the kingdoms clashing are outworking themselves. It would be tragic if we did not seek to understand the prophetic message and warnings given by Christ, by his apostles, and especially—in the Book of the Revelation—by John the Seer.

The Church and Its Conflict With the World Powers

This important battle between the church of Christ and the evil powers of the present age is described in the Old Testament, and the New, not only in the Gospels and Epistles, but most revealingly in the Revelation. For the moment we will not describe it in detail, but first deal with the nature of the Kingdom of God, the ends and goals which God has for it in history. In the light of these, the clash of the kingdoms becomes more intelligible, and the part of the people of God—the church of Christ—in this battle can be properly understood.

Note: The Great Unity of Scripture

It has been pointed out that there are 404 verses in the Revelation, and there are 518 references to the Old Testament, although there is not one direct quotation. Whilst we have referred to the Revelation as a commentary on, and an expansion of, I Corinthians 15:24–28, we must also see that there are many Scriptures of the Bible which help to shape our understanding of what is now happening between Pentecost and the Parousia. Passages from the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Amos and Zechariah in the Old Testament, together with Jesus' descriptions of the end-times, and the understandings of the apostles Paul, Peter, John, and also Jude, all help to form a unitive presentation of what we know as 'the now-time' and 'the end-time'.

With such scriptural guides as we possess, and with the sane and thoughtful use of them, we should be able to interpret the times in which we live, and know how to live as the royal people of God—a kingdom of priests unto our God—telling out the wonderful works of Him who 'called us out of darkness into his marvellous light'. We should also know how to live within the Kingdom, and fight against Satan and his world system—his counter kingdom of evil—and share in the victorious outworking of the plan of God.

SECTION THREE**Learning of the
Kingdom of God**

Having learned something of the kingdom of Satan and its stratagems, we need to know the triumph of God in history or we will tend to give evil a place of great prominence. In fact evil has never been substantial, and ultimately will be shown to have accomplished nothing, i.e nothing substantial.

To understand the great victory of God in Christ, the defeat of Satan and his powers, and the irreversible establishment of the Kingdom of God, is to discover the elements which both effect and make true history.

We must not think that such research into biblical materials is an unnecessary use of time and thought, but rather see how well equipped we can be to be worthy of the Kingdom for which we are suffering—if indeed we are suffering for it!

This final section, then, should be of immense value, and certainly warrants our attention and our understanding. It will help us to be better equipped for the battle which is now taking place. We are in the last days, and although they are demanding days, they are also great days in which to live.

If, of course, we are equipped for them!

CHAPTER ONE

*The Kingdom of God
and the Church*

The Kingdom and the Church

**The Kingdom and the Church
in the Last Age**

We have seen something of the nature of the Kingdom of God, and the kingdom of darkness, and how the two inevitably clash. What, then, is the part of the church in the constant conflict that is taking place? Is the church identical with the Kingdom of God, or does it serve the Kingdom? The answers to these questions we will

discuss below, but at this point we need to see that the church and the Kingdom are both involved in the movement of God in this last age. At first sight, in the Book of the Revelation, the church does not appear to be greatly involved, yet it is, and in fact quite deeply.

The church is constituted of the people who are hunted and persecuted by the dragon. They 'keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus' (12:17); they 'are slain for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus' (6:9; cf. 20:4); they are those saints who refuse the mark of the beast (13:7–10; cf. 14:12–13). They are, too, the 144,000 (7:4–8; 15:1–4; cf. 14:1–5), and also constitute the multitude that no man can number who have been through much tribulation and have made their robes white in the blood of the Lamb (7:9–15). It is these who experience 'the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance' which John describes in 1:9.

Later we will look at the principles by which the church works as it is one with the ongoing victory of the Kingdom of God. For the moment we need to examine the relationship which exists between the church and the Kingdom.

The Relationship of the Kingdom of God and Christ's Church

Again we ask the questions, 'Is the church of God the Kingdom, and the Kingdom the church of God?', 'Are the two to be identified as one, or are they both different aspects of God's action in history?'. Israel is at least once referred to as a church (Acts 7:38) where Greek *ekklesia*

(called assembly) and Hebrew *qahal* (congregation) are equated. Israel was a kingdom in some sense, for it was known as being a theocracy. Was, then, Israel both *ekklesia* and *basileia*—both church and kingdom? This being the case is the church both *ekklesia* and *basileia*?

If by 'the Kingdom of God' we understand the 'reign and rule of God', then our questions must be answered indirectly. The disciples asked Jesus (Acts 1:6) whether he would 'at this time restore the kingdom to Israel'. To restore the reign and rule of God to Israel does not mean that Israel *is* the Kingdom of God, but that it would be a people under the Kingship of God. Jesus replied that the times and seasons of the Kingdom were in the Father's hands. Their work was to receive the empowerment of the Spirit and to witness to him (Jesus) to the ends of the earth, i.e. that the Kingdom was to come to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles, but not to Jews only. The disciples then proclaimed that Kingdom to the world.

The church, then, must not be seen as identical with the Kingdom but as the proclaimer of the Kingdom or—better still—the proclaimer of the Gospel of the Kingdom. We see in the Book of Acts and other New Testament contexts that this was what the church did (cf. Acts 8:5, 12; 14:23; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31; cf. Col. 1:13; II Thess. 1:5; Rev. 1:9). The apostles were given the keys to the Kingdom (Matt. 16:19; cf. 18:18), and this certainly implies that by their preaching they would open the Kingdom of God to all believers. Some see the three outpourings of the Holy Spirit (at Pentecost, Samaria and Caesarea) to be the *apostolic* opening of the Kingdom to Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles respectively. Whatever the use of the keys, it was for admission into the Kingdom,

and not primarily into the church.

If the church is the Kingdom of God and not simply its proclaimer, then the nature of the church becomes unintelligible in the light of much apostolic teaching. The church then becomes the power structure of God within the world, and its operations are not primarily of a proclamatory nature but those of reform, moral determinations, and even of political actions.

Note: We can note that chronologically the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:14–15) was simply, ‘Thy God reigns!’, but the goal of Jesus’ coming was to effect salvation through his atonement, in which case ‘the gospel of the Kingdom’, can now rightly be called ‘the gospel of salvation’. What we must keep in mind is that ‘salvation’ is not limited to a person’s own redemption, but it is related to the wider issue also, of the redemption of creation in whatever forms God predestines it to be.

The Gospel of the Kingdom and the Gospel of Salvation

One matter which needs to be settled is whether there are two gospels, one which is the Gospel of the Kingdom, and the other which is the Gospel of salvation. Some readers of the New Testament tend to interpret the Gospel of the Kingdom to be *per se* the Gospel of salvation. There can be no doubt from Acts 20:20–27 that for Paul they were the one, yet what he says in this passage must be seen in the light of many other things that he says. For example, in Acts 26:18 the Gospel is that power which turns the Gentiles (nations) from the power of Satan

to God so that they then receive forgiveness of sins and ‘a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me’. This surely equates with Colossians 1:13 where Paul speaks of us being ‘delivered from the dominion of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of the son of his love’.

John and Jesus and the Gospel of the Kingdom

When John the Baptist preached the Kingdom it primarily related to the passage of Isaiah 52:7–10, the good news of peace is, ‘Your God reigns!’. The Kingdom was God’s power to deliver His people from bondage, and this Israel did not doubt to be true. That it required the ‘suffering servant’ of Isaiah (chs 40–66) to redeem God’s people by the way of suffering was a different idea from the primary one which people held, namely that of the triumphant Messiah or Son of Man who would come to liberate his people, take power, and reign. The context of Isaiah 52:7 is that of salvation, ‘Who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation’. Of course Israel would see this salvation primarily as release from their national oppressors. The idea of personal salvation was probably not strong in their thinking. Yet the angel had told Joseph, ‘You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins’, so that personal salvation is included, and the angel’s statement is virtually an interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 and context.

Jesus, likewise, came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom (Mark 1:14–15). His use in Luke 4:18–19 of Isaiah 61:1 was a message for the poor, the crushed and the prisoners. In the light of the beatitudes which speak of

the poor in spirit, the ones who mourn, and those who seek after righteousness and the Kingdom, we must see that this Gospel of the Kingdom primarily relates to salvation from sins (Matt. 1:21), and so from the powers of darkness. Thus when Peter reports that ‘God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power’, and describes how ‘he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil’, then this must be a commentary on Luke 4:18–19, and so Isaiah 61:1.

The Gospel of the Kingdom is very clearly defined in the first three Gospels. In Matthew 4:23 it is the Gospel of the Kingdom which heals and which delivers from the oppression of sicknesses, infirmities and demons. Matthew 9:35 repeats this principle, and in 12:28 Jesus is emphatic that, ‘If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you’. Matthew 24:14 (cf. 26:13) insists that this Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached among all nations before the end will come.

In the Acts and the Epistles the same idea of liberation from Satanic and demonic powers is present. This can be seen in those workings of miracles and signs of which Matthew 4:23, 9:35, and 12:28 speak. We see this in the ministry of the apostles, and in certain allusions in the apostolic Letters. In Acts 8 the message of the Kingdom repeats the acts of liberation and deliverance seen previously in Jesus’ Kingdom ministry. This would also be the case in such passages as Acts 14:3 and 19:8–20. Acts 26:17–20 certainly speaks of the Gentiles being liberated from their former bondage into the true light and ‘a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me’.

When we come to the Epistles we have Paul’s statement that the Father ‘has delivered us from the dominion

of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son’ (Col. 1:13). He adds to this the statement, ‘in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins’. Such a statement links Paul’s Gospel of the Kingdom with salvation. When Paul says that he is not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ ‘for it is the power of God unto salvation’, he certainly thinks of personal human salvation from the wrath and judgement of God, but he sees salvation having a very broad scope (Acts 26:18; Titus 2:11–14; 3:4–7; Rom. 8:23; cf. Luke 7:50). We can see from Acts 20:20–27 that Paul’s Gospel of the Kingdom includes ‘repentance to God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ’ (v. 21), ‘the gospel of the grace of God’ (v. 24) and ‘the whole counsel of God’ (v. 27).

We can, then, make the Gospel of the Kingdom, and the Gospel of salvation to be the one when we see it is the power of God to deliver man from evil and heal him of his afflictions. Yet the good news of the Kingdom is also the good news that the Kingdom of God has triumphed over evil, has defeated evil, and will go on doing so until there is no kingdom of darkness, and only the Kingdom of light, at which time the faithful will enter it irreversibly (Matt. 25:34; and context). The Cross not only saves man, but it defeats evil in all its forms.

The Atonement, the Gospel of the Kingdom, and the Gospel of Salvation

What remains for us to see now is that what in the Gospels is called ‘the gospel of the kingdom’ (cf. Acts 8:5, 12; 19:8; 20:24; 28:23, 31)

comes to be called in the Acts and Epistles, ‘the gospel of salvation’, ‘the gospel of God’, and ‘the gospel of Christ’. Is it then no longer called ‘the gospel of the kingdom’ though in fact it is still that. Because of the Cross and the Atonement, because Christ has defeated death both in the Cross and the Resurrection, and because both Cross and Resurrection have fitted him—in his Ascension—to be Lord over every dominion, authority, power and name that is named, not only in this age but in the age to come, Christ’s Gospel of the Kingdom has become the Gospel of salvation. At the Cross the evil powers were defeated (Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15), the captives of sin were liberated, and those under the doom of the law were freed from its power. By the Atonement Christ could now bring forgiveness and purification of sins to the human race. Through the Cross he broke the enthrallment of Satan, and by rising he showed his power over sin and death. Jesus the man became Lord of all, and his Gospel his power by which to free men and women from their various forms of bondage.

The Church the Proclaimer and Sign of the Kingdom

All members of Christ’s body are proleptically inheritors of the Kingdom of God. They have entered into the Kingdom (Col. 1:13), i.e. have come under its rule (Rom. 14: 17; I Cor. 4:20), but they must be wary lest they fail to inherit that Kingdom (I Cor. 6:9–10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5;

cf. Acts 14:23; Matt. 7:21–22). As those who proclaim the Kingdom, they oppose the powers of darkness and participate in the fall of the kingdom—or kingdoms—of this world. Wherever the church is, there is the sign of the Kingdom. The powers of Hades cannot prevail against it.

We have resolved, then, the relationship between Kingdom and church. The Kingdom is the reign and rule of God, especially as His rule brings men and women to His feet in submission. His means of bringing this submission about is His love, shown in the Cross, wrought in his salvation, and effective in human lives.

The Church Equipped for Proclamation and Conflict

If we see the church as simply maintaining itself in more integrity, being concerned for its own members, its own life, and seeking to defeat darkness for its own well-being, then again, we will find much New Testament teaching unintelligible. Whilst Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, he and his Father loved the world (John 3:16–17; 17:18ff.; I John 4:10–13; 2:2; I Thess. 3:12). The church therefore goes out into all the world to make disciples of the nations, and not simply disciples out of the nations (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:19–20; Luke 24: 44ff.). The nations are to be brought—through the church—to obedience to Christ (Rom. 1:5; 15:18; 16:26; cf. Gen. 49:10; Rev. 7:9–14) and so into the Kingdom of God.

This is the ministry of the church, by the power of the Gospel.

The Church Given Grace to Preach the Gospel

That proclaiming the Gospel is a ministry of grace given to the church cannot be in doubt. Paul is conscious of himself as the chief of sinners, but whilst saving grace to him is ever a matter of wonder, he is very firm that the command and constraint of preaching came to him from Christ as a matter of grace. This is seen in Galatians 1:15–16 (cf. Acts 9:15; 22:14; 26:16–20); Romans 12:3; I Corinthians 15:10; and Ephesians 3:1–11. This powerful Gospel (Rom. 1:16–17) and ‘word of the cross’ (I Cor. 1:18–23) was a treasure in earthen vessels (II Cor. 4:7–15) and would occasion much trouble to those who were made stewards of it (I Cor. 4:1), but it would be the power by which men and women would be changed. In one sense God had no other power (I Cor. 1:18, 23, 26ff.). The Gospel is powerful by nature of the case, but does not carry overtones of triumphal metaphysical force which drives men and women into salvation and the Kingdom. It is a Gospel of weakness (I Cor. 1:25ff.; cf. II Cor. 13:4).

The Church is Equipped With Gifts, Services and Workings For Life and Proclamation of the Gospel

I Corinthians 12:4–30; (cf. Eph. 4:7–15); Romans 12:3–13; I Peter 4:10–11; and Hebrews 2:4 show that the church is equipped with gifts for two definitive ministries,

(a) the building up of the body of Christ, the church, until it is strong and matures into the full measure of the very stature of Christ himself, and (b) the use of *gifts* to go to those outside of the church and proclaim the love of God in action, and by the word of truth. These gifts must be in the light of the *services* (‘ministries’) which all believers exercise, and the *actions* or *operations* which relate to both gifts and services.

Gifts, services and operations (workings) must be seen together, as constituting one work of life. Gifts that do not serve, and special workings that do not come out of humble love have no value. To consider others before oneself, and to think of them no less than ourselves is the authentic way of using gifts, services and workings.

The Church Equipped With Spiritual Weapons to Defeat the Enemy and Bring Men and Women to Salvation

The two kingdoms constantly clash and the church has been equipped with gifts for this warfare. Mentioned as they are in Romans 13:12–14; I Corinthians 10:3; II Corinthians 6:7; Ephesians 6:10–18; and I Thessalonians 5:8, the weapons or armoury when examined seem almost trivial. They certainly are not ‘carnal’ or ‘worldly’ for they are simply truth, righteousness, faith, the Gospel of peace, and such things. How would they avail against the *macho* weapons of the world? The word of truth (the Gospel) is a sword which will smite the nations. In the ultimate no one can prevail against love with all its beauties of peace and joy, kindness and gentleness. Whilst it is true that demons will flee before

the word of truth, that word is not itself harsh, and it delivers those who are ‘oppressed by the devil’.

***The Church is Equipped With the Wisdom of God
and the Mind of Christ***

Worldly wisdom and the ‘mind of the flesh’ have no power to counter those who have Godly wisdom and the mind of Christ and the Spirit. The passage of I Corinthians 1:17—2:10 contrasts two wisdoms. The first is the wisdom of this world which in God’s eyes is a ‘no wisdom’. This Paul explains in Romans 1:19–25 where he points out that in rejecting God and His wisdom man posed his own wisdom, which was in fact the product of a darkened mind. In the Corinthian passage he explains that one can use an ‘eloquent wisdom’, but be unable to preach the Cross by means of it, because God has made Christ to be His wisdom in righteousness, sanctification and redemption. This wisdom was prior to time, and had in mind the glorification of man, albeit he would fall into sin and rebellion.

Such a wisdom is unthinkable to the ‘worldly-wise’ man. Christ is God’s wisdom, and in him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge so that the believer is ‘filled full’ in Christ. The Christian man draws his wisdom from God’s wisdom. The world will seek to enslave the mind of a believer, posing a plausible ‘wisdom’, but it is an ego thing, a calculation concerning things made on the basis of self-interest and self-advancement. The renewing of the mind by the Spirit of wisdom assists the believer to both exhale the foul air of the evil and demonic, and inhale the fresh life of Christ. That which is evil cannot match that which is of God.

***The Church is Equipped
With Powerful Weakness***

We have seen that Christ was ‘crucified through weak-ness’, and that the ‘weakness of God is more powerful than the strength of man’. Only those who are weak are really strong, for God’s strength is made perfect in weak-ness. In Revelation 13:9–10 and 14:12 it is the patience and endurance of the saints which accepts persecution without retaliation or self-assertion that defeats evil. Love is more powerful than hatred, and innocence more effective than worldly wisdom.

Christ and His People in the Last Times

We can see, then, that Christ accomplishes his victories over evil through his people. From a worldly point of view such weakness as the church has is disgusting. Its refusal to ‘go political’, and its constant insistence on not defending itself—along with its refusal to use worldly wisdom—makes it an object of ridicule.

This is because Satan and evil powers have misjudged the power of the Gospel. The clash of the kingdoms is constantly taking place, but the battle is to the weak, and the victory to those who know ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’—for this is the true life of the Kingdom. Darkness is helpless against this kind of light.

The principle we have just enunciated is at the heart of the matter of spiritual conflict. In the face of current liberation theologies, and bring-in-the-kingdom ideologies, we must insist that the apocalyptic faithfulness is

not triumphalism in any of its forms. The triumph must always be that of the fruit of the Spirit, of love, of submission to even tyrannous authority, and the right use of prayer. In the face of this sort of weakness demonic aggression has no genuine triumph.

CHAPTER TWO

***The Continuing Clash
of the Kingdoms—I***

The History of the Clash

The beautiful serpent in the garden had an attractive proposition for the primal couple. It was, 'You shall not surely die, but you will be as God [or, gods] knowing good and evil'. What could possibly be wrong with such a proposition—no death, and richness of life, the ability to discern good and evil?

In our first section of the book we saw how it all began, and how the couple became entranced and seduced. We saw the division into two groups,

‘The children of God’, and ‘The children of the devil’. We saw how deceived and wretched the heart of man became, how defiled his mind and how great and heavy his guilt. Sin brings guilt, and guilt engenders sin, and so the evil of man compounds. Only grace can halt and alter it.

Whenever it was that Satan fell from his glorious position in the celestial order—taking with him other special celestial powers—we know that his kingdom became composed of celestial creatures and human beings, and this massive kingdom of darkness fancied itself not as being of the darkness but of the light—its own special ‘counter’ light!

We have examined that kingdom of darkness so that we will be aware of Satan’s devices and stratagems, which also means being aware of human devices and stratagems. It is essential to learn and to understand the principles by which evil can be defeated. That it can be defeated must never be doubted in our minds. We need, then, to examine the present clash of the kingdoms, in the light of the future outcome, for this outcome has been presented prophetically. Satan and his evil can never win. God is sovereign over all things, albeit it often appears that He is not.

Living in the Tension of the Two Ages

In I Corinthians chapter 10 Paul reminds his readers of the failure of Israel in the wilderness, and says that such happenings now come as a warning to us in the present time. We are those, he says, ‘upon whom the *end* of the ages has come’ (v. 11). Some translations have, ‘upon

whom the *ends* of the ages have come’, and the plural is correct. The two ages we know are (a) the present age which is evil (Gal. 1:4; cf. I Cor. 1:20), and (b) ‘the age to come’, i.e. God’s new age (Eph. 1:21; Heb. 6:4). The believer lives in the intersecting or overlapping of these two ages, and it is the conflict of these two ages which constitutes the tension under which the person of faith must live. The believer belongs proleptically to the new age yet has to live in this present age, and be in its environment. This is almost the same as speaking of ‘flesh and Spirit’, ‘Adam and Christ’. The old age is corrupting and passing away (I Cor. 7:31; I John 2:17) yet it continues to hold its devotees fascinated and in bondage. It sends out to its slaves the continuous message of ego, of anti-God hatred, of being righteous—of oneself—and more righteous than God or His followers. The new age dynamically grips the believer, assuring him of the complete liberty to come, and the glorification which will ensue.

Presence, Promise, and Fulfilment

Part of the tension under which we live is that of knowing the *presence* of the Kingdom of God, yet knowing that its *fulfilment* has not yet come. In between the presence and the fulfilment lies *the promise*. By faith we know that we are already in the Kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13–14). We know this because we already have the forgiveness of sins. We can rightly claim that our present experience is that of the Kingdom of God which is ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 14:17), and that the kingdom of God is not

merely a matter of words, but a matter of power (I Cor. 4:20). Given in all this, we confess that only by faith does the church know the presence of the Kingdom as by faith it awaits the fulfilment. It has to confess that it shares 'in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance' as it waits for the consummation of the Kingdom.

Of course the Kingdom is powerful in its presence for the King of the Kingdom is also the Lord of his church, and is with it until the consummation of the age, and the full coming of the Kingdom (Matt. 28:20), yet the church knows his presence by faith and not by sight. It is by the obedience of faith that the church works in power, and if we compare this with the dynamics of Christ's presence in Palestine where he accomplished great signs and wonders before the eyes of his followers, then we can understand the difference we know, when now he works, for even that present working is only seen by faith, and not by sight. In one sense it is a hidden work, and one which the world will not acknowledge.

Even more demanding is the fact that we presently are expected to work the works of God and are not simply to be spectators—by faith—of Christ's working. He works in and through his people—his body. He is subduing his enemies, he is pulling down strongholds of evil and redeeming man, he is defeating the stratagems of the kingdom of darkness. He demands the obedience of faith from us, as he works. Our works witness to his working through us. They witness to his Lordship and his present victory.

This is the constant battle of the kingdoms, then, to defeat each other—the one for good and the other for evil.

The world—the evil age—uses all kinds of methods to win the battle, but the new age is one of righteousness, goodness, holiness, love and truth. It must—and does—confine itself to such weapons. It cannot use the stratagems, techniques or weapons that the kingdom of darkness employs. For this reason the believer has to live in the tension of the two ages. His own flesh cries out to use similar weapons—to defeat evil by political might, by surpassing the power techniques of worldliness, but he may not. He must use the seemingly mediocre weapons and armoury of love, joy, peace, faith, hope and humility. Even so, this tension is most beneficial. On the one hand it teaches him the effectiveness of these spiritual elements and on the other continues to train him, and by such discipline to bring him into moral and spiritual maturity—the true maturity of character.

The Things We Face in the Age of Tension

The Matter of Idolatry

Idolatry is simply giving the worth that rightly belongs to God, to anything which is not God Himself. 'Giving worth' is itself the primary exercise of man. Created as a creature of the Creator he must acknowledge God as Creator, but can do this only by truly being the creature he is. Man's shame at being only a creature causes him to want to be Creator. Hence he idolizes himself. He seeks to be a Creator. Likewise being a child of God by creation (Acts 17:28) he rejects the idea of God's Fatherhood, and

makes himself a 'no-son'. Being a subject of the King of all creation he refuses his King and is his own subject. All of this causes great tension and he wishes to find a deity of his own making. As we have said, he is forced to idolize himself.

Idolizing oneself must always present problems, for in spite of ourselves we come to see ourselves, and we are forced to notice limitations, weaknesses and even failures. We must then idolize something of greater worth than ourselves, yet retain the right to have that idol serve us.

Man's Compulsive Need For Idols

The idol has to be a surrogate God, even though the devotee rejects the idea of its 'Godness'. As Jeremiah observed, 'The way of a man is not in himself', and this means man cannot rely on himself. He had great love, peace and joy when related truly to his Creator-Father-King, but now that relationship has been killed he must manufacture love, peace and joy from his idol. He thus makes many demands on his idol, and the idols—as the Jews were quick to say—are dumb. He can neither evoke or supply satisfying emotion. So often drugs or other sensual experiences are called in to do this task.

We saw in our first section of this book that evil powers do not stand by idly. They take the object of affection and worship and inhabit it, hence Paul's saying that if we offer sacrifices to idols then we have fellowship with demons (I Cor. 10:20–21). Satan and his minions lust for worship. Indeed all human beings wish to be worshipped, appreciated and adored.

We can understand what happened when man rejected

God, especially as Paul sets it out in Romans 1:19–25. Man—depriving himself of true God-worship—was bound to worship something, and the idols were closest to hand, for man devises his idols in his own mind. Idols are at first fascinating, and give great emotional satisfaction, since in fact they are extrojections of the images of man's mind—his desires and demands. Of course they have no real existence, but they appear to have ontological existence.

Sooner or later the idols wear out, become dumb and silent, or—through their evil demonic inhabitants—exact a fearful toll of their devotees. The believer's heart and his flesh cry out to God—for God—but the idolater has nothing which can correspond to his need. He cannot correlate to any *made* thing as he could to the *uncreated* God. Terrible is the toll the idols make as they destroy their devotees who have become their victims. 'They who make idols become like them.'

The Gods and Idols We Make

It is possible to make an idol out of God. Ontologically this is impossible. In imagination it appears to be possible. Get some Bible verses together, especially those of a certain ilk and you can fashion yourselves a kind and benign God who never has wrath or anger, who gives only what His devotees ask, and who is fair-minded in all weathers! Because this God does not comport with all the Scriptures He is unable to help His worshippers.

The means by which God has primarily revealed Himself is His word. Today we use our imagination. We visualize God! That is to say we shape Him as our imagination thinks best. In other words we create the God

we think He ought to be. We even change the word of the Scriptures to have the meanings we think they ought to have, and by so doing think we are speaking the true truth! In this way we form a word-idol, a thought-image. We can even devise a 'concept-God' and mistake the thrill of devising new concepts for the very worship of the true God Himself! New concepts often stir the heart and evoke emotion, but we remain as deluded as any idol maker.

Today there is a great use of symbols, signs, charts, and elements of the imagination. Paul speaks of sinners becoming 'vain in their imaginations'. We can imagine up a better, more acceptable God than the One we see staring at us from Scripture. Indeed, we are so fascinated by what we can imagine and evoke from our minds, that we feel no need of any other source for creating. The very word 'creative' delights us, although, technically, it is a word which can only rightly be used of God the Creator.

The Idols in History

Man's history can almost be called a history of idolatry. We hear little of Satan in the Old Testament, but we are driven to see that Israel was gripped by its idols, and this must mean that in an almost anonymous way Satan has carried on his warfare with God and His Kingdom through the medium and agency of idolatry. When Joshua informs us that Abraham and his family were idolaters we see the great significance of God's revelation of His glory to Abraham. It was to rid him of the idolatry which had gripped him that God showed His glory to Abraham. Abraham, in seeing God's glory and believing in Him, defeated the stratagems of Satan for himself and his posterity.

All of this lends great meaning and understanding to the fact of God's covenant with Abraham. Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for justification. Justification, then, was the great barrier to idolatry. To know God in His glory, and thus in His justifying righteousness, was to see the tawdriness and ineffectiveness of the idols. The idols diminish before the glory of God, especially as that glory is expressed in the universal covenant of salvation blessing and the gift of the Spirit. By covenant God led His elect people out of idolatry into the true worship of Himself.

That is why, then, we see God as jealous of the idols when he speaks to Israel. Indeed, if we were ever to count up the amount of text in the Old Testament given in relation to the idolatry of Israel we would be greatly surprised. God loathes the idols, is jealous of them. The evil of idolatry is that man is made to love God, his fellow creatures and himself, and this rich *agape* (essential and true love) with which he was created now becomes devoted to things other than God, other than his neighbour and other than his own true self. Hence God calls man's idolatry 'adultery' and 'fornication', for He knows the intimate love for which man was created is given over to a form of harlotry. Israel is God's bride and wife but she plays the harlot. The harlotry is the idolatry. No less in the New Testament is idolatry a form of promiscuity. Even covetousness is named as idolatry, and the battle the people of God have is not only with the beast and its unholy image, but with the great prostitute Babylon who seduces the kings of the nations, and even the nations themselves.

These idols all relate to demons and evil powers. Israel was caught in the grip of such powers—hence her refusal to listen to the clear words of God through the prophets, and hence her destruction. It was left for Stephen to tell Israel that she had always been incurably idolatrous. As in the wilderness she had grieved the Holy Spirit with her idolatry, so too in the promised land she had always resisted the Holy Spirit, as he would have led them out into sheer love to God, devotion to Him, and the pure worship that the nation could have offered.

When Jesus came to Palestine he perceived that even though the demon of idols—as such—had gone out of Israel—yet that demon had brought back to the idol-swept heart of the nation seven demons even more terrible than itself. Israel’s seeming reformation into pure monotheism had not destroyed the love of idols, so deep in her heart. How much, then, had Satan battled against the people of God through the medium of idolatry! The question is, ‘Has he deceived the present people of God? Does he still use the fascination and seduction of the idols? In this age is he battling successfully on the same front, and is he even winning that battle?’.

Idols in All Nations

The Jew looked with distaste at the Gentiles who worshipped idols. So, no less Islam of later years with its pure monotheism, destroyed the altars and shrines of the nations it conquered. Even so, all nations are led by the idols, the evil powers, and the demons. ‘Righteousness exalts a nation’ for it seeks God’s righteousness. The idols of Islam long ago perished but the new idols of its lands are the same as in other lands—wealth, materialism,

and self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is the ‘clean idol’ that justifies a nation in its human moralism. There are many idols we worship today—though not named as idols. In our art, our music, our entertainments, and our sport, we breed our endless course of deities.

Balaam was a man who understood the fascination of idols. He would have prophesied *against* Israel for money, but his prophecy—under inspiration—became one *for* Israel. This immensely annoyed Balak the king of Moab, who was prepared to pay handsomely for a prophecy which would have gone against the people he hated, i.e. prophecy that would virtually have been a curse. Balaam then counselled the Moabite king to entice the Israelites by means of Moabite women to share in the worship of their gods. Balaam knew the terrible vengeance God would take against His own people who worshipped idols, and what he counselled took place with fearful results. Later Balaam himself was destroyed, but the incident shows how fascinating idols can be, since their connotation is almost always a sexual one. Idolatry is perverting the pure love God has given man for Himself, turning it to deviant relationships, using the dynamics of love for false worship.

Paul said, ‘We are aware of Satan’s stratagems: we know what he is about’. We sigh and ask, ‘Do we really know? Are we killing our idols, or are we just shamelessly, and incurably idolatrous? Are we not giving entrance at the very heart of our nations to the cruel despots—the idols who serve the prince of Darkness?’.

In regard to idolatry we must conclude that idols have never ceased to be: they largely control our so-called modern and scientific world, but they bring no love, no

joy and no peace. Ruthless, they cannot have mercy. Empty, they can give no grounds for hope. They are bitter and ruthless enemies of the Kingdom of God.

Israel, Paradigm of Warning For the World

Idolatry is no light matter. In I Corinthians chapter 10 Paul takes the unusual step of using Israel's history as a warning against idolatry. He speaks of the events written in Exodus chapter 23. He first informs his readers that the supernatural food and drink that Israel ate and drank was Christ himself. Yet the people of Israel wanted the things of sight, rather than the unseen things of faith. Whilst Moses spent his forty days with God on Sinai they became impatient, and itched to accomplish something. They wanted a practical and sensual worship and so they made the golden calf—linked as it was with the ancient practice of bull-worship. They shaped their god and told each other, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'. God's anger burned against the people and he would have destroyed them as 'they sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play'. Then—as now—idolatry has always been a sensual thing.

Paul's use of this incident was to warn us 'upon whom the ends of the ages have come' that it could happen again. Sure of ourselves that we stand firmly, we may find ourselves suddenly in idolatry. If we are tempted to idolatry then God will give us a way out of that temptation. Idolatry is countered and destroyed by utter love for God Himself, for only that love is satisfying, and truly fulfilling, as we are now about to see.

How, Then, Do We Fight Idolatry?

We regard it as 'natural' for the 'natural man' to idolize his world, but even there he is 'unnatural', perverting the worship for which he was created. It is truly natural for man to worship God since his created being correlates with God as Creator, as Father and as King. When man truly correlates with God he comes into rich delights. Hence the psalmist can claim, 'My soul thirsts for thee; my flesh faints for thee', or 'My soul longs for thee, O God. My flesh thirsts for God, the living God', and 'My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God'.

It is natural—by creation—for us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. It is thus natural for us to love our neighbour also—as ourselves. Paul said, 'If any man love not the Lord, let him be accursed'. The psalmist cried simply, 'I love the Lord!'. If any man call this difficult, then let him try to love God and he will find it most rewarding. Loving God is the true way of destroying idolatry, defeating the powers of darkness, and living in the light of God.

CHAPTER THREE

*The Continuing Clash
of the Kingdoms—II***The Power Connection**

Power is the primary thing sought by fallen angels and men. Life is generally a scramble for power. Part of the reason appears to be that all that is evil seeks to prove itself righteous. Man has an in-built self-proving, self-vindicating, self-justifying technique. No sooner is he accused than he declares himself righteous. He seems to think that if he ascends to the place of the highest power then he cannot be threatened with insecurity.

Hebrews 2:14–15 indicates that man lives in fear of

death and so is subject to the kingdom of darkness, and its accusing, terrifying king—the god of this world, Satan. Guilty man is always trying to justify himself. His greatest justification—so it seems to him—is that he has composed for himself a place of security, i.e. higher than others where death *seems* to be less threatening. In fact no one ever achieves security, that true *shalom* (peace) of which God speaks, and which He gives to those who love Him.

The devilish drive of man for power derives from the god of this world. He says he will be like the Most High God, and promises man the same prize, but by nature of the case this is impossible, for both devil and man are simply creatures, subject to death and destruction if they embark on evil.

Whilst all this may sound biblical, doctrinal and theological, the fact of human existence is that living in this world is frightening when every human being is on ‘the power trip’. Some gain power by emotional victimizing of others; some do it by gaining the ascendancy in intellectual brilliance, vocational cleverness, calculating astute-ness—and many other ways. Milton’s words apply here:

*Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days.*

One paradigm of the power-crazy person was King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He was high in self-adoration for what he had accomplished but his pride sent him mad. ‘Whom the gods wish to destroy they first make proud’, says an old Greek aphorism. Lucifer was one who fell in love with himself. We all know that wretched

state of being. History, then, is the story of one vaunting ambition after another.

If one could recount all history we would see the chaotic divisions of humanity—once created from ‘one blood, to dwell on all the face of the earth’. We would see power-kingsdoms rise and fall to be lost in the sighing of the desert sands, or to fall into stark tragedy. We cannot trace it all for it involves suicide, homicide, patricide, fratricide and genocide. Popes have struggled with popes, Christians with Saracens, denomination with denomination, even—sadly enough—saint with saint, teacher with teacher, and theologian with theologian. It is the story of intense rivalry of brother with brother, spouse with spouse, friend with friend, and enemy with enemy. Power struggles are found in the heart of families, of national politics, and sadly enough within the church itself. Millions of gallons of blood have been shed in this vicious, violent, and utterly useless struggle. Lord Acton’s dictum, ‘Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely’, is well known in the human race.

Again—in this matter of power-compulsion—the king-dom of darkness seems to have always held the upper hand, and to have succeeded where heaven appears continually to have failed. Yet this is not truly the case. It is the unseen battle against pride, ambition and rivalry that counts for most. There have been many saints who have despised themselves for ‘vaunting ambition’ and have rejected it, who have felt sick with disgust at the temptations to rivalry they often face, and who battle the battle of love, not wishing to have power of any kind. These are learning rightly to use the power they are bidden to exercise, and are a testimony to the fact that they do not

desire power. We would probably be amazed if we could take the power of the Gospel to bring men and women to humility, and keep them there utterly rejecting ‘fame as the spur’ to be a means to true security.

Humility and Weakness Defeat the Forces of Evil

The history of the church has—much of it—been the story of power struggles. Whenever the church mistakes itself for the Kingdom of God and fails to be the sign and handmaid of the Kingdom, then power-compulsion becomes endemic. Forgetting that it lives at the end of the ages, and that it has no strength but by grace, the mistaken church brings to bear all the wisdom it can muster, in order to accomplish the strategies it has planned and the goals it seeks to reach.

Much is made today of naked power. Whilst men such as Hitler and Stalin are criticized for their use of power, yet at the same time the *macho* use of power is highly praised. Today in our media of radio, television, films, newspapers, journals and novels we have our steely-faced, impassive strong men who dispense justice from the end of a gun—as though that were true justice! We have super-men and super-women, as well as bionic types whose powers go beyond that of the ordinary man in the street. When God lags behind in His action, these tough types go ahead, dealing out justice and retribution right and left. They are impatient and critical of ‘the God-that-does-nothing’.

Who, then, would think that the most powerful of

all things in the face of such naked power could be the simple fruit of the Spirit? Yet it is love, peace, joy, gentleness, humility and unchanging faithfulness which so many times undo the proud man and reduce him to simple wonderment. Those who come to the end of the road of power, who become disillusioned and even cynical, are often ready because of their failure, to know the joy and wonder of weakness. They have tried power—so-called—and found it to be empty and hopeless.

All that is of the kingdom of darkness is outwardly impressive and attractive. This kingdom knows how to use power politics and power play. It causes numbers to be significant, and success to be the end-all for the players. In I Corinthians 1:26–29 Paul has a list of those who were not of noble birth, who were weak, who were low and despised, who in fact were so low and despised that they were counted as nothing. Yet Paul accounts them to be the true people of God, and—in the ultimate—the most glorious of all.

The Battle is to the Weak

John the Seer in his prophecy of the Revelation speaks of the power of human weakness. Long before, Paul had discovered that only when he was weak was he genuinely strong. God had told him, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness'. The powers of darkness despise this kind of thinking. Paul insisted that Christ was crucified through weakness (II Cor. 13:4), i.e. he did not resist 'the princes of this world' (I Cor. 2:8; cf. Acts 4:27–28; John 18:36–37; Acts 2:23), but submitted to crucifixion.

John the Seer—as we have partly seen—depicts the people of God as weak. They suffer 'the tribulation, the kingdom and the patient endurance'. Indeed, 'patient endurance' is quite a statement, for the holy brethren are pursued by the dragon, and threatened by the beast so that they must wear his mark of 666. The beast is allowed to make war on the saints and to defeat them. They must not resist him forcibly. They must use no worldly sword, and make no resistance to arrest.

This is consistent with Messiah himself. Called 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah' he turns out to be 'a Lamb as though it had been slain'. His humility is the element that helps to conquer man. Nothing it would seem ever comes to a person who does not have great possessions, one home or more, money enough to build his desired projects, and power sufficient to defeat others and win his own ambition, but this is an illusion, especially seen in the light of the Lamb. Christ was weak in becoming a man, in going to the Cross without any fight back against the injustice of it. He was crucified in weakness. He had in fact abandoned himself up to the powers and sin that came to him (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:1; cf. John 14:30–31), and similarly God had abandoned him up to the same evil (Rom. 8:32). In one sense God and Christ had given everything they had into that event of the Cross, and had retained no reserves.

That kind of weakness, of course, is God's strength. Paul said that 'the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men'. We cannot stay—as human beings—and parley on this kind of idea. To us power is power—and that is it! Such talk of weakness is nonsense.

How Weak is the Church When it is Strong: How Strong When Weak?

Paul said that ‘Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles’. Great signs spoke of a strong God able miraculously to change the tide of affairs and overwhelm a weak world. Wisdom spoke of a great God whose knowledge surpassed that of man so that He could—as He wished—overcome those of little knowledge. The idol of the Jews was the wonder-working God, the great God they had on their side, and the idol of the Greeks was wisdom, for wisdom can take the world in its grasp.

History has shown us that when Israel thought itself to be strong and vital it turned again to idols. When it was crushed and humiliated it turned to God in repentance and was restored. Time and again this process took place. Similarly Nebuchadnezzar was drunk with pride for his having built the vast city of Babylon, but he became a raving creature in the wilderness because of his foolishness, i.e. his overweening pride. Through the humiliating gift of insanity he learned his lesson. In his new-found sanity he said:

At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him who lives for ever:
for his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing;
and he does according to his will in the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;

and none can stay his hand

or say to him, ‘What doest thou?’ . . .

Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven; for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to abase.

Christ had to chide some of the churches in his letters to them. To one church he said, ‘You have a name that you live, but you are dead’. Was this a triumphalist church? Another church said it was rich and had need of nothing, and he told it that it was ‘wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked’. This, sadly enough, has been the history of many churches. A great church across North Africa disappeared under the hordes of the Islamic onslaught, but it had been corrupted in many ways, prior to that onslaught. Debate still continues as to the value and correctness of the Crusades against the Islamic hordes. Doubtless it is difficult to judge what would have happened had the Crusades not occurred, but only the weakness of the church can ever win. The Roman church has—from time to time—espoused power politics and power play and has been much the worse for that. The story of the church in South America and the domination of peoples by its hierarchy constitute one of the worst power plays in Christian history. History has terrible stories to tell of the domination and the cruelty of the medieval church as it sought to rule state after state, and to persecute heretics—so-called—in the days of the Inquisition. Nor has cruelty towards heretics been confined to the Roman church. The use of power has also been the problem of State churches, for many of these churches have bargained for position in return for supporting the power structures of the state. Today new

doctrines are coming into view which espouse the use of power in politics, even to the use of war *matériel*.

The New Power and Prosperity

Today some movements are opting for *the prosperity cult*—the doctrine that God blesses His special ones with material wealth and position. Some look to fulfil the man-date of having dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28) by the use of power. This system is called *dominion teaching*. Followers of these two cults see God as having lost His dominion when man fell, and believe that the task of the church is to win the victory over all evil and set up a new government—a Christian government—upon the earth. Since all governments are tainted with human politics and ideologies—be they in Christian countries or not—then the new deliverers must effect a radical and total change in the order of government. This they see as the Kingdom of God prophesied in the Old Testament, and seemingly launched by Christ. They seek to imitate his use of signs and wonders as he used them in Palestine, and they also seek to be light, and salt and other penetrative elements in society, infiltrating into every strata of the world community, setting up a provisional government for the time when Messiah arrives, and they will present to him the Kingdom. In this way the prosperity and dominion cults merge and become a power force to be reckoned with politically. In this new drive for reformation and power there is a curious mixture of bedfellows.

There is also a curious mixture of eschatologies. Amongst some, the old premillennial eschatology is quickly being abandoned for a new brand of postmillennialism

which sees the present surge of charismatic power as the means of 'bringing in the Kingdom'. Some churches have been enormously encouraged as thousands have flocked to their congregations, and they have been emboldened in their promotional efforts not only to further enlarge their groups, but to become effective power units in the new struggle for holy supremacy in an unholy world. Naturally they turn to the governments of their own lands in order to influence them first for good, and then for radical moral change, and—it is envisaged—for Christian government in which they—the new power groups—will have a considerable part, eventually taking over 'for the Kingdom of God'.

Other Power Endeavours

Much of Europe was evangelized by the sword—i.e. power endeavours that were political. Much of Asia and the Americas came under political pressure to convert. It would be impossible to compute the deleterious affects—and effects—that this mode of evangelism has had upon the history of these lands, and the attitude to the Gospel which it has wrought. Even great missionary endeavours offered material advantage to the people to whom missionaries went. The proliferation of schools, hospitals, and material help was not the kind of offer made in the apostolic era. The earliest missionaries went with the word of God, the Gospel of truth, and often under great persecution their hearers accepted that word, and so much so, that churches sprang into life and by means of spontaneous expansion spread throughout many lands.

There was no offer of material advantages as such. The Christian way of social care, medicine and education is consonant with the Gospel, but not as a means of evangelizing. The generosity of Christian churches has often been the cause of anger in their opponents. They see it as taking an unfair advantage. Indeed they see it as a power ploy.

What, also, of our present social activism? Is it an essential part of the Gospel? Is its logical conclusion—liberation theology—to be espoused, especially in its more radical forms which accept the Marxian analysis of history, and seek to bring about social justice even with the use of weapons and terrorism? Do such ends authentically justify such means? Questions such as these must not be answered by a simplistic ‘Yes!’ or ‘No!’. The primary question, nevertheless, remains, ‘Are Christians committed by reason of the Gospel and its truth to enter into power-situations? Are they called upon to use any and every means to attain the goals of equality of opportunity and participation in social living, the use of power, the world’s wealth and amenities, and is such a goal the essential goal of the Gospel?’.

It seems that no immediate answer in the negative or positive should be given, especially without thought. The Trinitarian action of God working ceaselessly in His universe should be addressed first. The person and work of Christ the Son as Lord should be understood, and no less the person and work of the Holy Spirit as he leads and empowers God’s people in their participation in history. A biblical eschatology should be espoused, and the dynamics of faith, hope and love be understood for—and in—the outworking of history.

The Dynamics of Faith, Hope, and Love

Idolatry is the espousal of certain images and patterns which condition our thinking as they call for our loyalty. The idols are always intelligible to human reasoning, for they are things of sight, and not at all things of faith. To see the deity ‘imaged’ in forms of wood, stone and metal is to handle and touch our concepts in visible form. Since in one sense they are plastic we can alter them at will.

God forbid idols. The question constantly asked—against the idols—was, ‘To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?’. Hence the question, ‘Who is like unto you, O Lord amongst the gods?’. There is no known thing or phenomenon at which man can begin in order to know God. His own imaginations and visualizations will be profitless since they spring from him. Man is shut up to faith in order to understand God, and true faith is dependent upon God’s revelations of Himself, through His word, through angelic visitants, through His law, His prophets, and His Son. Even so, faith is based upon reality.

So is hope. Hope is always with a view to the future, and God has pronounced the truth regarding this future. Man cannot live in hope or faith—or both—without love. Man’s love is *for* God because firstly it is *from* God. Faith, hope and love are always based upon the objective reality of God and His actions. One of His actions is His promises.

Because God has given hope for the future and faith in His own working—promised or otherwise—man may make mistakes of two kinds. On the one hand he may work in order to make God’s promised goal of hope

come true, in which case he may interfere with the works of God's hands, and so do despite to it. On the other hand he may view the future with the kind of determinism which is akin to fatalism, and which prevents a man ever co-operating with God as He works.

True faith, hope and love operate with the knowledge of God, the understanding of the objective reality of God's action, and within the relationship which the person of faith, hope and love has with God Himself. This, then, deters man from reforming his universe, liberating it from its bondages as he—the man—sees them, and encourages him to do the will of God as it is revealed to him, and as he is empowered to obey it.

Power and the Pursuits of Evil

We have barely touched upon the politics of power, the use of psychological pressures upon persons and nations, especially the dynamics of guilt and pity in manipulating the powers that be. We have nominated so few of the power-endavours that inhabit our world and work ceaselessly in pursuit of their goals. The relevant question is, 'Where power is concerned, what is the drive of intelligent creatures that makes them desire to gain their goals?'. We ask ourselves whether the present humanism we know has not always been the basic drive of fallen human nature. As we have said, man has a compulsion to prove himself, vindicate and justify himself as a person in his world. There are no lengths to which he will not go. He constantly desires to play 'God' to his audience. He is often impatient with God because of His—seeming—

tardiness in working. Man admires his own magnificent abilities to change society and to transform the world-scene. So, therefore, the high incidence of utopian reformers, liberationists who see bondage in every human situation, and self-appointed messiahs who would do more magnificently than the very Messiah himself!

How much of our endeavours spring from self-justification, and how much from anger against a dilatory Deity we cannot say. How many hidden agendas there are conditioning us we also do not know. We do know, however, the drive for power. It is a self-preserving, self-extending drive and its origins are literally devilish. They spring from that arch-perfectionist, Satan himself. He, of all, would be like the Most High God, and we understand that drive! We follow in his train but rarely—if ever—do we see ourselves as compulsive perfectionists seeking to set the world to right.

The primary tragedy is that we play into the hands of the power brokers of the kingdom of darkness. When we use 'worldly weapons' then we are one with the world. Whilst we must be alert against private pietism, other-worldly approaches to tragic human situations, and a 'hands-off' strategy where both social concern and social justice are the question, yet we must also be alert to the nature of our inner drives of human pity, indignation at injustice, and anger at oppressive authorities.

If we do not understand the power of weakness, the nature of submission where secular and evil powers have been given temporary victory, and if we are open to unthinking humanism, then we are not fighting wisely in and for the Kingdom of God. The evil one has deceived us by appearing

to be light, and seduced us by appearing to be beautiful. He may even have threatened us with the tragedies for which we will be responsible for refusing to use power-systems, power-politics, and power-strategies and ploys.

CHAPTER FOUR

***The Continuing Clash
of the Kingdoms—III***

***The Church and the Christian Person
in the State of Crisis***

The Pilgrim Church

We have seen that the church is a pilgrim people. Hebrews chapter 11 depicts even the reasonably affluent Abraham as a pilgrim, 'For he looked forward to a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God'.

Verses 32 to 38 are a graphic and beautiful description of the pilgrim people:

And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

The chapter closes with the words, ‘And all these, though well attested by their faith, *did not receive what was promised*, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect’. Hebrews 11:13 says, ‘These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth’. ‘Strangers and exiles’!

Christ’s statements about his true people being ‘the salt of the earth’, and ‘the light of the world’, indicate the minority state of the church. Its characteristics of light and salt show as penetrative and preserving elements, rather than elements which overwhelm a society and capture it. In the same vein Paul enjoins the Philippian Christians to ‘be blameless and innocent, children of God without

blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast [or, forth] the word of life’.

Peter in his first Letter addresses the church as ‘exiles of the Dispersion’ comparing them with the scattered tribes of Israel who lived as a minority amongst the vast nations of the world. In the same Letter he enjoins them, ‘I beseech you *as aliens and exiles* to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul’.

Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount addressed his true people as those who would suffer persecution for the Kingdom of heaven’s sake. The Lord’s prayer which is a prayer for the coming of the Kingdom prays for daily bread in the face of strong opposition. It confesses daily dependence on God for maintenance. In the same breath Jesus warns them against the accumulation of riches. It is difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven, let alone live in it according to its principles of personal weakness and dependency.

We have seen the warnings given against self-justification, self-confidence, and the exuberance of triumphalism (I Cor. 10:12). One is constantly dependent upon God for being led in victory (II Cor. 2:14; I Cor. 15:55–57). One is only strong when one is weak (II Cor. 12:8–10). One has no competency in ministry apart from Christ (II Cor. 3:4–6). Only because ‘he who is in one’ is greater than he who is in the world (Satan) can one overcome (I John 4:5; 5:4). All the enemies cannot separate the people of God from the love of God in Christ, because through him they are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37–39). Yes, in Christ one can do all

things (Phil. 4:13) but in one's own strength one can accomplish nothing of lasting value.

Facing the Enemy

Recognizing Our Innate Weaknesses

Paul said we are aware of Satan's stratagems, and so we need to be or we will not battle intelligently. In the light of knowing the enemy we must also be aware of ourselves, so that it would be good to assess the nature and situation of the believer, especially as we live in the tension of the two ages or systems—the present evil age, and the age to come. The following points should prove helpful:

- (a) We are innately weak, unable of ourselves to defeat the world, the flesh and the devil. These—of themselves—are stronger than we are of ourselves. In Romans 7:13–25 Paul gives a good exposition of sin which dwells in the believer, showing that we cannot overcome it—of ourselves.
- (b) We are creatures with five senses who live in a universe of three dimensions, and have right desires which can quickly develop into harmful lusts—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.
- (c) We have minds by which we reason and rationalize life. All the time influences flow towards us from the headquarters of evil, seeking to conform us to

certain wrong modes of thinking. This is called 'the world about us', and it bears in upon us from a thousand different sources.

- (d) We are creatures who are not proof against human pride. We are constantly temptable, and particularly through our five senses. We have pressures about us to force us into self-justification and self-vindication which are not true Christian values.
- (e) We are constantly tempted to idolatry since idolatry is the quickest way to emotional satisfaction and fulfilment. It also fits with human imagination and images which have their source of origin within us.
- (f) We are always open to fear of the unknown, fear of ridicule, fear of failure, and the guilt which comes with failure, as also the loneliness which comes with non-acceptance by society. We fear persecution which will come upon us when we do not conform to the world, or the current mores and views of our society. We also fear being seen as weak. We would rather be a member of a strong movement or group rather than a ministry which seems to achieve little.
- (g) We are easily made insecure when—in our desire to live holy lives—we fail, get caught in things we despise, and seem not to mature through true Christian growth.
- (h) We are liable at any moment to fall out of love, be dilatory in our faith, and slothful in hope. We find

it difficult under these conditions to be sure of the reality of God, to feel His love, and to be aware of Him and so to believe all His promises.

Being Aware of What God has Made Us to Be

All the points above seem common to believers in general. In addition there are believers who know so little of the Scriptures, and not too much of the truth of the Gospel. Some Christians do not fully understand the redeeming grace of God and so are troubled by their pasts, never feel completely forgiven, carry certain guilts in their minds, sense something of uncleanness in their lives, and live in a mixture of what might be called 'law and grace', when in fact it is neither. In these states of mind they are often easy prey to the enemy, especially where they are driven to despair by accusation, and continue to feel their helplessness where they ought to know the power and victory of Christ. In the face of these and similar things we need to note the following objective facts regarding the believer:

- (a) The believer is totally forgiven, completely justified, and cleansed from all moral stain and pollution (Matt. 26:28; Acts 2:38; 10:43; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; I Cor. 6:11; Heb. 9:14; 10:22; Titus 3:5-7; Rev. 1:5). Because of this state, the past is utterly forgiven by God and not remembered by Him (Jer. 31:34), hence is not to be remembered by the believer since his sins which were once like crimson are now as white as the driven snow (Isa. 1:18). The pardon is complete (Micah 7:18-19),

and so 'there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus'.

- (b) The believer has been radically changed from what he was. He has been 'born again', but this through the word of God (James 1:18; I Pet. 1:22-23) and by the Spirit of God (John 3:3-6; Titus 2:5-7). He is thus a new creation and the old has been changed to the new (II Cor. 5:17).
- (c) The believer has been crucified with Christ and so lives the new life by faith in the Son of God (Gal. 2:20). Having been saved by the death of Christ he now lives in the power of the risen Christ (Rom. 5:10, 17). His participation in the 'old man'—Adam—has been broken off, since the old man has been crucified (Rom. 6:6). Likewise he has been crucified to the world and the world to him which means he has no part in the world (Gal. 6:14). His 'flesh-life' has also been crucified (Gal. 5:24) so that he is under no obligation to live to the flesh (Rom. 8:12). Likewise the power of sin has been broken through the Cross (Rom. 6:12-14; cf. John 8:31-36), and he is justified from sin (Rom. 6:7) and freed from its power.
- (d) The believer is not simply a 'saved person' but is a son of God (i) by new birth (John 1:12-13), and (ii) by adoption (Gal. 4:4-6; Rom. 8:14-16). As such he is in the family of God (Eph. 2:18f.; I Tim. 3:15) and lives the family life of family love.

- (e) The believer has received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 3:2, 14) who now lives in him (II Cor. 1:22) and aids him to defeat the flesh (Rom. 8:13), the lusts (Gal. 5:16), and not to be under (the condemnation of) the law (Rom. 8:2; Gal. 5:18).
- (f) With the gift of the Holy Spirit the believer has received an anointing by which he knows the truth, and this is within him (I John 2:22–27). He can thus monitor what he hears and so is able to discern untruth.
- (g) The believer is an overcomer or conqueror (i) because Christ has overcome him and his rebellion (II Cor. 2:14), and (ii) because in Christ he can now fight evil and conquer it. This is seen in Romans 8:37–39; Philippians 4:13; I John 5:4–5; and Revelation chapters 2 and 3; 12:11; 15:3; especially 2:26–28.
- (h) The believer does not have to operate on his own. He lives in the Father, the Son, and the Spirit and is upheld by them. Again he is a member of the people of God, and the community as a whole faces and fights the powers of darkness.

All of these things strengthen the believer when he knows and *reckons upon them*. False humility and mock modesty are of no value to him. He must recognize the *grace* that has made all these things to be so, and so have *faith* in that grace. He can be obedient if he will.

Living by Faith in God

John said, ‘This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith’. He did not mean that our faith directly overcomes anything, but that our faith that Christ is the Son of God helps us to go ahead in the grace of God. Jesus told his disciples, ‘Have faith in God’, meaning that without that faith they would never understand the things he did. Hence Paul speaks of using ‘the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one’. He also calls it ‘the breastplate of faith’. The writer of Hebrews speaks of the people of God ‘who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight’. Hence John writes, ‘I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and *you have overcome the evil one*’.

Peter said, ‘Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith’. James added, ‘Resist the devil and he will flee from you’.

Prophylactic Preparation to Defeat Evil

James advised, ‘Submit yourselves to God because *he gives grace to the humble*’. Then he said, ‘Resist the devil and he will flee from you’. Peter gave similar advice as to humility, ‘*Humble yourselves* therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. *Be sober, be watchful*’.

Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion’.

Humility and vigilance truly equip the believer to fight evil. Time and again in the New Testament believers are called to be alert, ‘Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light’. ‘Gird up your minds, be sober.’ ‘The night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light . . . put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh.’ ‘Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.’ ‘Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.’

What we need to remember is that sin and Satan’s defeat can be stopped right at the point where we are vigilant. Often when we sin, our sin did not begin at that point of defeat, but further back where we refused to be diligent. We let sin and evil creep up on us. We live without being guarded in the truth because we are not girded in it. We have made provision for the flesh.

Perhaps no more powerful preparation is recommended than that of Ephesians 6:10–18 where Paul speaks of the elements of the Christian armour and the weapon of the sword of the Spirit. All of these elements such as truth, righteousness, peace, faith and salvation are those we must live out in life. No imagining that we are putting them on will actually put them on if we are not living the truth, reckoning in faith, resting in peace and walking in faith.

The New Testament also gives us other practical prophylactic advice such as ‘Be angry but do not sin; do

not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil’. If we have unrighteous anger then we have given a place to the devil, and he will surely utilize this opening. This links up with, ‘Strive for peace [reconciliation] with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” spring up and cause trouble’.

It is in the relational area that Satan gains so much entrance. I John 3:10–12 tells us that Cain’s anger brought him into the camp of the evil one. John comments that to hate one’s brother in the heart is to be counted as a murderer. Jesus taught the Jews that not to hear the truth was to hear—and live in—the lie of the evil one. The devil was a liar and a murderer from the beginning, and he never stayed in the truth. Elsewhere Jesus pointed to him as the thief who came to steal, and to kill and to destroy. All of these things warn us against relational anger and its terrible consequences when Satan has an entrance and wreaks havoc amongst even those who are believers.

Knowing and Facing the Enemy

The Nature of the Enemy

Someone has said that we do not fight a battle with Satan and his forces, but a continuous campaign, and this is the case. Paul said of Satan, ‘We are not ignorant of his designs’. In one sense, then, we need to know the enemy and his goals. Revelation 2:24 indicates that we do not

need to study ‘the deep things of Satan’. We need to know ‘the deep things of God’ as the Spirit reveals them (I Cor. 2:10), but we can certainly know the things of Satan that are evident when we know what he is about.

Satan—God’s Ape

In Section One of this book we saw that Satan is a mimic, i.e. ‘God’s ape’. We saw that he seeks to build up a counter-kingdom to the Kingdom of God. He is not a creator, and even if he were could not go outside the bounds of God’s creation, since he, too, is a creature. He is bound to operate within that which is ontological, and he seeks to use the dynamics of the ontological, hence his false ‘trinity’, his anti-ontological endeavours (i.e. seeking to oppose God’s true creation and Kingdom), as also his ante-ontological works (i.e. his endeavours to create his kingdom as the exact counterpart to the true creation and Kingdom).

Fallen Angelic and Demonic Powers

In this counter-kingdom he has a third of the angels of heaven, for he swept down a third of the stars. This of course is part of ‘the myriads and myriads and thousands of thousands’ of angels and so constitutes a vast number of fallen celestial creatures. Some of these were given principdoms and authorities of a special kind. Doubtless they were—and are—brilliant in their abilities and powers. How many of these celestial creatures are now demons and unclean spirits we do not know. We simply know that demonic powers are linked with idolatry, and humanity

has been sore pressed by such forces from time to time. Some scholars have a different idea of the origins of demonic creatures. What we do know is that they are numerous. The creatures issuing from the abyss in Revelation chapter 9 are numerous and cruel.

The Unholy Trinity of Evil

We have also seen that the red dragon who is the devil in another guise, has devised an unholy trinity consisting of himself, the beast which arises out of the sea (cf. Rev. 17:1, 15), and the second beast which may be simply the image of the first, and may be the false prophet. The beast has a mortal wound—as did Christ—but was healed, thus making it a thing of wonder, and a kind of resurrected creature. The third creature of this evil trinity has powers we generally accord to the Holy Spirit. It is this unholy trinity that the faithful face, and with whom they must do battle. The beast was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. The second beast is able to win the kings of the nations to join forces ‘for battle on the great day of God the Almighty’.

The ‘Mother of Harlots’—Babylon the Unclean

Along with this triad of evil is another enemy, no less evil, and no less powerful. She is called ‘the mother of harlots’, and her name is Babylon. Babylon has always been a byword for arrogant pride, autonomy and worldliness. If Satan—the dragon—is referred to as masculine (cf. Rev. ch. 12), then Babylon is the epitome of evil femininity. She is the embodiment of idolatry—‘mother of harlots’—

for idolatry is referred to in the Old Testament in such terms. She rides upon the beast and she seduces the kings of the earth. Her name is synonymous with that kind of commerce which captures the world. She is the Chief Gourmet, titillating the palates of the great ones, for when she is eventually destroyed the merchants of the earth weep and mourn for her and cry, 'The fruit for which thy soul longed has gone from thee, and all thy dainties and thy splendour are lost to thee, never to be found again!'

This woman is unclean. She decks herself out with brilliance but is evil. She is cruel for, 'in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth'. Hers has been a long history of evil. There is no part of life or society into which she has not penetrated. There can be no doubt that the evil trinity, the world system they have created, and the great harlot, are all part of the force that opposes God and His people, and in this system are those human creatures known as 'the children of wrath', and 'the children of the evil one'.

The Corporate Forces of Evil

These are the forces which war against the Kingdom of God. They are forces which have terrible weapons, and their modes of battle are fearful. Accusation against God and His people, denigration of His creation, defilement of His pure sovereignty and degradation of the human race are part of their operations. Satan is a compulsive perfectionist who wills that he be 'like the Most High God', who will ultimately give himself out in the very temple of God to be the prime object of worship as

though he were 'very God'. All his forces, slaves and minions are driven by the same compulsive force of perfectionism, and amongst his devotees are the self-righteous of the human race.

The Presence of the Occult

Whether the occult is a myth or not, whether it is a hoax or not, it stands continually confronting the human race. That the occult is an ancient institution is not in doubt. Wizardry, witchery, divination, necromancy, soothsaying, the use of augury, the use of charms and amulets—amongst many other things—are the operations of the occult. All of this is linked with idolatry and the worship of evil spirits and powers. The occult and its practices occupy a large part of the human race. It is not confined to those peoples called 'animistic', but moves into the heart of modern society whether western or eastern. Whether it be the reading of tea-leaves, the use of ouija boards, the holding of seances, or the cult of Satan-worship, the occult persists in being about us. Some speak of 'white magic' and others of 'black magic' but it is all use of powers which are supposed to be supernatural, and so beyond the knowledge and use of science.

Doubtless the barrenness of much of life, the removal of the supernatural from human experience, and the rationalization which comes with modern materialism, takes away the mystery of life. No doubt this has created a vacuum so that worship is now empty. It is no wonder that human beings hunger for some mystique, some ritual which tells us that all does not begin and end with three dimensions and five senses. Whether it be the blood-and-heart stirring beat of heavy rock music, the

simulated supernatural by the means of lights, shadows and mystery, modern man is wide open to deceit and seduction. His uneasy conscience causes him to seek anodynes for his never-ceasing guilt. He is ready to expose himself to anything—no less the occult!

The occult was forbidden to the people of Israel, Deuteronomy 18:9–14 being one of the prime passages stating the law against all things occultic. Christian missionary history leaves us in no doubt that the occult has vigorously and venomously opposed the entrance of the Gospel light to its darkness. Modern medical science has not rid us of demons even if, often, it denies the reality of demons. Doctors of Christian faith and experience can generally discern the difference between mental illnesses and demon possession.

Conclusion: The Battle is Joined

When we survey the field and forces of evil our hearts could quail within us. As soldiers who are about to go into battle have heavy apprehension, deep misgivings, and a release of adrenalin, so might we be as we face the battle to be joined. The fact is the battle has long ago been joined. Armed with the above information and equipped with some understanding of the enemy and his stratagems, we are not about to engage him. Long ago—even in our own lives—he was engaged.

The revelation of what the battle is about as the forces of evil seek to subvert God's plans for history, is helpful to us. Perhaps we can better understand the nature of

the conflict. This may not alter its intensity but it does assist us to see what God is about, and so what we are called to do, and to be.

CHAPTER FIVE

*The Continuing Clash
of the Kingdoms—IV**Coming to the Conflict***Engaging the Enemy**

That we engage the enemy is a fact—‘we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’. We are, then, as human beings contending with forceful evil powers. That this

battle has always existed is clear from the word of the apostle John in I John 3:10–11, for he shows that Cain was of the evil one—Satan—and slew his brother because Abel’s works were righteous. The offering of a true sacrifice by Abel who was a man of faith, was too much for Cain, whose offering was unacceptable because of the frame of mind in which it was offered. We also know that Abel was a prophet, that part of his righteous works would have been prophecy, and that Cain at least partly opposed Abel because of this. Cain is the first nominated child of the devil. The battle, then, has been from the beginning.

This battle began with the serpent in the garden who is later identified as ‘the great dragon . . . that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world’ (Rev. 12:9). In former chapters we have generally covered Satan’s plan of action, and his opposition to God and His people. We have seen the growth of idolatry as indicated in Romans 1:22–23, and have noted the compulsive drive man has to worship images since he must worship something.

God broke into this generalized idolatry of the human race by revealing Himself to Abraham, causing him to have faith in the God of glory, and so to be the recipient of covenant promises and covenant grace. Even so, Israel had great trouble with and through idolatry, so that the battle continued to rage throughout its history. Even though idols had been banished from Palestine by the chastised nation of Israel, yet idolatry had not been exorcized from their hearts. Stephen pointed out to his enraged Jewish listeners that they were incurably idolatrous.

The coming of Messiah was the coming of the

Kingdom, and the kingdom of darkness received a fearful setback, as Jesus healed, exorcized demons and in this way and measure pronounced the Kingdom of God. Even more fearful to the powers of darkness was his defeat of them on the Cross with the consequent liberation of mankind. The Resurrection was horrifying to the powers of evil, and they viewed with apprehension Christ's acceptance by the Father in the Ascension, and his authority over all things by his session—i.e. his being seated at the right hand of the Father to extend his victory over evil in the practical outworking of their defeat and doom.

The General Campaign and Conflict Being Waged

It is true that each believer is involved in the conflict with Satan and his forces, whether he desires to be so or not. Yet that conflict is a general one, e.g. 'We are not contending against flesh and blood, but [we are contending] against principalities and powers'. We need to keep in mind the fact that God is sovereign, and His Son works with Him in resolving the defeat of evil. We have seen that the hosts of heaven, and the faithful on earth are part of the true army of Christ. We have also seen from I Corinthians 15:24–28 and the prophecy of the Revelation—amongst other biblical passages—that the overall conflict is not in the hands of mankind—even believing mankind. The endeavour of many groups to bring in the Kingdom, or to establish universal justice by means of terrorism, violence and revolution is not the way in which

God works to defeat the kingdom of darkness.

We may, then, leave the general plan and conduct of the destruction of the kingdom of darkness to God and His Christ, for the kingdom of this world will become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, and He will reign forever. For our part we must take up both defensive and offensive patterns of conduct. If we do this in personal ways, that will be good, but if we do them in individualized and privatized ways, then that will not be good. It is not 'every man *for* himself', or, 'every man *by* himself', but it is '*all together* in Christ having one mind, and this for the common good'. This is clearly seen in Philippians 1:27–28. The blending of the personal and the corporate elements is seen in the following passage of I Peter 5:6–11:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you. To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

We see, then, that the brethren throughout the world are facing the same situations, and that suffering is required of all, yet the outcome is the defeat of the devil. On this principle we can now set about working on the principles which will oppose, baffle and even topple Satan, his hosts and his kingdom.

The Ways of Warring With Evil

The first thing we must keep in mind is that we are not warring primarily with our fellow-creatures but with evil powers. We must not mistake the one for the other. The second principle to keep in mind is that our weapons are not fleshly or worldly, but spiritual. This must mean that we do not fight with the same weapons used by the world and its kingdom of darkness. Satan's pride and human pride must be defeated by Christ's humility. Hatred must be defeated by love, even if that love must sometimes be thought to be tough. Naked power and force must be met by proper submission, and the use of spiritual power.

So we might go on, nominating counter-forces to evil's forms of pride, power and oppression, but in fact we do not practise opposites simply to defeat evil. We live the positive life of love to God and man, obedience to God in acceptance of His divine law, and His plan of wisdom. We delight to do His will, and we accept the accountability that goes with being made in the image of God, being a fellow-worker with Him, and having the dignity that comes with the practice of the truth.

The following principles, then, are ones which we can practise without even coming into hand-to-hand combat with evil. Such principles act as prophylactic, defensive and offensive methods of action in the endless spiritual warfare. As they are written below they may seem disappointing even to the believing reader. He may look for something more brilliant, more stimulating and more powerful. He may even consider the things nominated as making spiritual warfare to be a domestic matter! Well, then, he would be right. The battle is not fought on high

spiritual Himalayas, but in the domestic rooms of the mind, out on the ordinary roads of wayfarers, and in the places where men work, socialize and live.

Let us, then, not be contemptuous of the simple ways of living and defeating evil.

We are to Love the Lord Our God With all Our Being

To love God is to know Him, and to know Him leads us on, increasingly to love Him. Only those born of God really know Him (I John 4:7-8). Knowing or not knowing, we are nevertheless commanded to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Since we have been created by Him and redeemed by Him at immense cost of suffering, then it is reasonable to love Him. To be created by Him and not to love Him is to go against our nature as it is in His image and relates to Him. Therefore, to love God with all that we are is simply the continual fulfilment of ourselves. This not only insulates us against the idols, and against penetration by evil, but it richly fills us out in love, peace and joy. In fact it is our life, for to know God is eternal life (John 17:3; I John 5:20).

We Need to Hate Idolatry, Insulate Ourselves Against it, and Where Caught By it to Withdraw From it

Idolatry is imaging anything which is other than God and is taking God's place. Idols are surrogate gods; they are substitutes for the true God. All images are stimulating. Arising from the imagination they create a world

other than the true one. They delude us into thinking that we can assert them against the true world, and can, in fact, create another world in which the same demands—especially the moral demands of God’s true law—cannot be made on us. They relieve us of the demands of true accountability. They help us to make decisions apart from God. In fact they tell us there is a world for us where God Himself is not necessary.

We have seen how God hates idols, and will destroy those who cling to them. He understands their fascination and infatuation. ‘Let Ephraim alone’, he says. ‘He is joined to his idols’. That is, we shall get no sense out of infatuated idolaters. Where we have no idols we defeat evil. We give it no entrance. How, then, do we withdraw from idols? By deliberately loving God, *even against all inclination not to love Him!* Soon the true nature of our union with God will show itself. Idols die without the adulterous and fornicating love men give them. Then is evil truly defeated.

Abiding in God and Being Dependent on Him is Our Way of Life—It is Anti-evil

No true life is lived apart from God. No true wisdom is known except in Him. God told His people that He would not only be with them—His covenant people—but that He would walk amongst them (Lev. 26:12–13). He told them He had broken the power of the enemy, ‘I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect’. Christ prayed that as he—the Son—was one with and in the Father, so God’s people would be one in them—the Father and the Son. John the apostle later said, ‘God is love,

and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him’.

Living in God and having God living in us is our insulation against the false fascination of idolatry. Yet it is not merely this. It is our true life causing us to worship Him, especially as we know Him.

Living in Worship and Service is True Love

Satan desires worship of himself above all things. He aspires to being worshipped as God. He is a slave-master to all in his power. He hopes—in the guise of the son of perdition—to be worshipped in the temple of God—as God! God demands total worship, and such is for our good. Worship and service are the one. He who worships God finds himself in the most wonderful of all mysteries, and in the most demanding of all services. Yet true man’s delight is to do God’s will. Living in the worship and service of God makes us invulnerable to the attractions, deceits, threats and seduction of evil powers.

***Walking in the Way of Truth and Law,
i.e. Being Girded With Truth Defeats the Power of Evil***

The way of true law is the way of life. When, by God’s grace of justification, the condemnation of the law is a finished factor in the life of the believer, then law becomes a delight to him. Law is the way of truth. Truth is something we do rather than only something we know. To walk in truth is to live the way life really is. It is to know God ‘[whose] faithfulness reaches to the clouds’,

and to live by Him. God's holiness, goodness, righteousness, truth and love become part of the life of the believer. This makes him impregnable, for he cannot be gripped by that foolishness of evil which appears as magnificent wisdom to the worldling.

***Walking in Light, i.e. Walking in Holiness
is the Way of Defeating Darkness***

The way of light is the law of the Lord. In the Lord there is no darkness at all for He is truly light. All of us know the law, the truth, and it is simple to walk in such light. 'Without holiness no one shall see the Lord', is the constant statement of the Scriptures. In fact we dare not see Him without the holiness He gives to us by His grace. What is given by grace must be taken hold of by faith, and when we do this we know the beauty and splendour of holiness. Not only the sheer purity and cleanness of it is satisfying to us, but the light in which we walk keeps us proof from the dread darkness. We constantly anticipate the joy of seeing God face to face, and this is the kind of hope that keeps stirring us, and drawing us on. It does not merely make us 'other-worldly' so that we do not live on this planet. It makes life on this planet a right and good thing without it being idolatrous.

This holiness is most practical. It refuses the fleshly things that would assault the soul. It hates 'even the garment spotted by the flesh'. It wrestles with indwelling sin, and triumphs through the Spirit. It gives a wide berth to all things occultic. Indeed it opposes them. It has nothing to do with reading tea-leaves, playing with ouija

boards, taking part in seances, experimenting with table lifting, utilizing charms and amulets, trusting luck, obeying superstitious injunctions, taking part in idolatry, learning 'the deep things of Satan', listening to false prophets, diviners, necromancers, wizards, witches, and spirits of any kind. Holy people of God are sensitive, alert to false teaching, to seductive practices, to the deadly threats of dark powers, and the roaring of the dark lion of evil and death.

Their holiness is one which does not fear these elements but overcomes them by the sheer life of purity. Such purity does not come out of their own efforts or doing, but out of the grace of God. As such it is lethal to evil, and deadly to impurity.

***Standing Fast in the Victory of Christ, Living
in Grace by Faith, and Overcoming the Evil One***

We have seen how Satan goes about as a roaring lion, as a world accuser, threatener, deceiver and seducer. If a man does not live in holiness, if he does not live in the truth, and if he does not walk in holiness, then the flaming darts of the wicked one will be accusations which pierce his flesh and his mind, and come close to wounding him in the heart. The victory that overcomes the world is our faith. 'They have conquered him [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.' They refused to give in one inch to his accusations, and indeed confronted him with the completed work of Christ, the victory of the Cross and the grave, and they themselves were not afraid of death. The victory

that overcame was their faith, not faith in their own faith, but faith in the object of their faith, Christ the Son of God.

How frustrating and infuriating for the powers of darkness to see people of faith rest in the work of God, and *not* seek—in panic, fear and attempted self-justification—to defeat them by special acts of supernatural overcoming. Simply to rest in Christ in his victory, is angering to the creatures of God's wrath—the denizens of the kingdom of darkness.

***Living the Life of Prayer is Terrifying
to the Powers of Darkness***

'Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.' Satan hates the idea of prayer. For a weak human being—aided by the Holy Spirit—to pray according to God's mind and will, represents a power which seems no power to the secular and cynical mind, but is what God desires most that His children should do. This is no place to extol the modes and methods, the patterns and powers of prayer. 'Pray without ceasing' is enough indication that unceasing prayer plays a major part in the battle against the forces of darkness, and in victory over them. Prayer is being with God, living consciously in Him and His love, hearing Him, knowing His mind and will, speaking to Him, and asking according to that will, so that He will do what He determines.

It is this union and communion with God which strikes terror into the heart of evil, but brings assurance to the heart of the one absorbed in the gift and practice of prayer.

***Wearing the Armour of God and Using the Spiritual Weapons
He Has Given Us Actually Protects Us Against Evil, and
Helps Us to Tear Down the Bastions of Satan***

In our discussions of the spiritual weapons, we have seen how simple they are, and how unpretentious. The steely-eyed saviours of our films and novels would look with contempt upon our helplessness. Love, joy and peace would seem to them to be trifling things. These self-determined saviours meet injustice with guns and guts; they tidy up a world by their special acts of might, and appear to shame a God who is too indolent or weak to do so. Patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control would be seen by them as harmless enough, but in their eyes no great match for the dreadful evil, both seen and unseen, that is in the world. As for truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and hope—why these would seem to these masters of might to be wholly innocuous.

Taken then, 'the strong things' of evil and the flesh—idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like—those nominated by Paul as 'the works of the flesh'—what magnificence is there in them? They are mean, petty, evil, vicious, pointless and brainless. They defeat nothing except it be the dignity and nobility of man. They accomplish nothing except the debasement of the human spirit, and when their end comes, what is left? Nothing! Rape, murder, matricide, patricide, fratricide, homicide and suicide may sound magnificent in grand opera but what are they but hideous

and pathetic expressions of human anger, bitterness, jealousy and hatred.

In love lies the greatest and only true power to defeat evil. We are not speaking of human love with its cloying sweetness, its deceptive fascination, its luring seduction, but of love that goes out to rescue and redeem, to heal and to hold. It is God's love only, and not ours, but it becomes our love when it comes to us from His grace.

This is the love that breaks down bastions of evil. Evil may guard itself against such love, but it cannot defeat it. The love that revealed itself at Calvary is the love that can regenerate the most sin-sodden heart, that can bring the murderer first to horror at his evil, dread of its judgement, and joy at the forgiveness he receives.

The one life that ever lived out the full harvest of the Spirit, and that expressed love in its full and true form, was that of Jesus of Nazareth. He was not a brilliant antagonist of evil—as such—for men only saw him meet humanity where it was—and always is—and speak to it out of a life filled with the good things of the Spirit. They saw his holy anger, his sadness at men's unbelief, his strong opposition to self-righteousness, and the loveless severity of false holiness. What they did not see well—if at all—was his battle with evil on every front, his attacks on demonic oppression, on the demeaning sicknesses and diseases that made humanity despair of the creation as though it, itself, was cruel and threatening, and within which that humanity seemed encased—a perpetual prisoner. He saw men and women trapped within their own guilt and the accompanying fear of death. Yet in all this it was not some brilliant supernaturalism that attended him and set them free. It was pure holy love.

Likewise, it was pure holy love on the Cross which grappled with sin, and tore out from men and women the core of guilt, and set them free from the bondage of misery. Death could not keep this holy one in a grave or even visit him with any form of disintegration or even the slightest touch of corruption. He broke through the death men dread with what he had been given—a holy mind and heart and conscience—and by the power of the Spirit he passed on this spiritual victory and accomplishment to his kith and kin, his new friends whom he was not ashamed to call 'brethren'. They who had been bereft of moral power and moral competence, now had these unbelievable gifts—gifts which the worldly-wise, the brilliant, and the clever are still unable to recognize as the greatest endowment Christ the Conqueror has given to the human race, i.e. to that part of it which is called 'the elect'.

These gifts and weapons, then, are ours to use in the bitter and relentless campaign which Satan wages against God and His people, and which God and His people wage against the kingdom of darkness. It may be said that they have no gifts and weapons but holy love, simple faith, unvarnished truth, ceaseless hope, unending shalom, and the invincible word. It is against such that even the gates of Hades shall not prevail. The world shall be brought to its ultimate end by these, and by nothing else. The vast supplies of human wisdom will fail pathetically, and the arsenals of its weapons shall be helpless. The word of God shall smite the nations, outface the shame of demonic and human might, and cause all to kneel at Christ's feet and acclaim him as Lord, to the glory of the Father.

In that hour the righteous shall shine as the stars of the heavens, and the glory of the new humanity surpass even the wildest and most extravagant imaginings of human minds. That will be the hour of Messiah's triumph and the simple victory wrought by holy love.

The Simple Victory

Doubtless some readers will be disappointed at the nature of the statements given immediately above. They may agree that what is said is true enough, but they may feel it lacks the desirable 'how to do it' of modes and methods. They may feel the lack of application. 'How', they may ask, 'do you apply all of these things you nominate? They are biblical and probably true, but we wish to know how they work out in our age and generation, and how we can apply them'.

The work-out of these principles would be a heavy demand. To apply the principles set out in our previous chapter, and the ones nominated immediately above would require a volume on its own. Some of the books recommended in the bibliography attempt what I have not done in this respect, and I must leave the readers to them. I believe that most of us are adaptable enough to the age in which we live, and can perceive in the immediate moment how we should act.

The battle, however, is to the simple, and the successful campaign to the Lord.

We have, then, to keep two things in mind, the first being that our method of battle is not simply non-resistance, sometimes called 'non-violent' or 'passive resistance'.

It certainly is not a *laissez faire* policy as Christian non-martial action has often been interpreted. It is neither assertive nor aggressive, and it lacks anger in its motivation. The second point is that far from being passive, indolent, and static—waiting so to speak upon the actions of the sovereignty of God—the church is dynamic in love, rich in faith, positive in hope, and so works with those very acts of God's sovereignty. It knows God to be the God of action. Weak in itself the church may be, and weak, too, its saints may be, but the secret of victory is that weakness, since it is weakness in God. It is submission to God and co-operation in His acts.

As we have said—time and again—this so-called weakness is the true power of God. Paul was only strong when he was weak, and we have to be strong enough not to be strong in our own strength, but strong in our weakness because of His strength. These statements are not a mere playing with words, but rather the stating of what is to fallen human thinking a puzzling paradox. We need, then, to be strong enough to be weak. We repeat, 'Christ was crucified through weakness' (II Cor. 13:4), God has His weakness (I Cor. 1:25), and God uses the weak things of the world to confound the strong (I Cor. 1:26–29). Christ said to the church at Philadelphia, 'You have but little power', and he meant this was how the world saw that beleaguered church, but not how he saw it. Of the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, only two have unqualified commendation and this was one of those churches.

We see, then, that it is of no disadvantage to be weak as the world counts weakness. Indeed it is the highest

advantage. It is the old principle of the Lion of Judah being the Lamb 'as though it had been slain'. Christ crucified is the true secret and source of power, and so must his people be weak that they might win.

We repeat, 'The weakness of man is the power of God', and so the victory is simple. The outcome can never be in doubt. Love is the great overcomer, for God's love conquers all.

CHAPTER SIX

The Continuing Clash of the Kingdoms—V

The Constant Conflict

The Beginning of the Conflict

In the Section One of this book we examined the so-called origins of evil, stating that there can be no ontological origin of evil since God is Creator of all things, and He does not create moral evil. Even so, we saw that Satan was created as an unfallen angel, but fell. He was perfect in all his ways until he was corrupted with his own beauty. Pride was the cause of his fall, as indeed later it

was the cause of man's fall. The aim of his rebellion was to transcend God Himself, or—at the least—to deceive creation into thinking he was (or, is) God.

Creation began without immediate rebellion. The celestial system was complete until the rebellion of Satan and one third of the stars of the heavens, i.e. what appears to be one of three courses of the angels. The serpent's intrusion into the affairs of God and man at the time of the Fall, caught man up into the system of the world, so that John could later say, 'the whole world lies in the evil one'. The immediate result was two systems—that of God and that of the world, for two families came into being, and Satan became the father of the rebellious of the human race, Cain being the first nominated child of the devil. Evil was now on the march. Yet evil was under the threat of doom.

Evil Under Doom

At the time of the fall of man, God gave His great prophecy of the defeat of evil by the seed of woman (Gen. 3:15). We saw the development in prophecy of one who was to come as the seed of woman, whether it was the ruler of Judah in Genesis 49:10 who was to receive the obedience of the nations; the one of Psalm 2—the declared Son of God—who similarly was to have power over the nations; or the Son of man of Daniel 7 who was to have rule over all the nations. There are other prophecies such as those of 'the Righteous Branch', 'the Davidic King', the one of whom it would be said, 'thy king cometh', and even 'the Suffering Servant' of the

latter half of the prophecy of Isaiah.

These prophecies—amongst other similar predictions — meant that Satan and his kingdom were to be destroyed. Whilst the world system of Satan may have appeared—through the ages—to be in the majority, to be triumphant, and to be headed towards final victory over God and His Kingdom—yet the system of evil has always worked under the sense and reality of impending judgement and destruction. Revelation 12:4 shows that the dragon ('that ancient serpent who is called the Devil and Satan') 'stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth'. The text goes on to show that this child was one prophesied in Psalm 2, i.e. 'one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron' (Ps. 2:7–9; cf. Rev. 2:26–27; 19:15).

Revelation 12:12 states 'the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short'. Satan, then, has a knowledge of his doom, though his own spirit of deception has always deceived him, and he has persisted in believing he would ultimately win the conflict. The demons besought Jesus not to send them into the abyss before the time (Matt. 8:29; Mark 5:7; Luke 8:31), for they appeared to have an understanding that at a certain time they would come into torment.

The Doom of the Day of the Lord

The day of the serpent's doom was prophesied in Genesis 3:15, although no date was given. The theme 'the day of the Lord' is strongly emphasized in both Old and New Testaments. Whilst 'doom's day' is grim for impenitent

sinner, and for the forces of evil, it is really 'the day of delight' for the people and forces of God, since it represents the destruction of evil and the deliverance of creation from its oppressors. It is the time of the new heavens and the new earth. All sorrow, pain, tears and death are banished at this point in history, and the Holy City becomes the centre of all worship and intercourse. In Revelation 10:7 it is announced, 'in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled'.

All this accords with the prophecies in the Old Testament of the new heavens and the new earth, and in the New Testament with Christ's own prophecy of 'the new world' (Matt. 19:28) and with Paul's prophecies of all things being united in Christ, as also all things being filled up, harmonized and reconciled. Peter and Jude also give prophecies of the coming appearance of Christ and the new age. John in his Letters refers to the evil powers which seek to delude believers into moving their way, and John as the Seer who brings the prophecy of the Revelation, is the most profuse in his descriptions of the coming age.

The Powers of Darkness Under Control

When we have this perspective on history then we can see the pressures under which the powers of darkness move and operate. Their stresses are indeed great. What is the message of doom to them is the message of hope to the people of God. The stress that the people of God have

will be relieved by the day of the Lord. The church at Smyrna is told it will suffer tribulation 'for ten days' which means there is a limit set for its suffering and beyond that evil cannot test it. Paul told the church that 'No temptation ['testing']; cf. James 1:2-3] has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it'.

The powers of darkness, then, have a certain restraint upon them. The devil has but a short time, the demonic powers will go into the abyss and be tormented, evil will come to bursting point like a boil, but when the moment of judgement is ripe it will be judged and destroyed in the lake of fire—the second death. Many things may be permitted to be done by evil, but only within the plan of God, and only in view of the ultimate reckoning. The demonic forces that are loosed from the abyss have 'five months' in which to do their work of torture (Rev. 9:5). The martyrdom of the beloved of God is set as to time and numbers (Rev. 6:11). The beast is allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them, but his doom is measured as to time and operations. Likewise with the second beast, the false prophet and the devil himself.

Mankind is included in this programme of judgements. This is clear from the description of seals unopened, trumpets sounded and bowls of wrath outpoured. For those who despair of the triumph of God as they look at the vast suffering of the world, these words should be of comfort. Whilst much suffering is self-wrought and self-deserved, yet much comes from the attacks of evil upon man and creation. By nature of the case God does not

immediately intervene in certain situations for they must 'ripen', i.e. come to their own ultimate climax of evil, and then judgement will come. The Lord 'speedily avenges his elect', but that does not mean that what we consider to be 'speedy' is what God considers to be 'speedy'.

The main point we are making is that we must not think the kingdom of darkness has things all its own way, so that it simply does as it wills. Its defeats are many, its powers are strictly limited. It is forced to work within certain parameters, and its stratagems can be denied or defeated. Nor should we think that it does not suffer the terrible pangs of judgement and its own unrelenting remorse. There is no peace to the wicked, and there is no joy to the evil.

All Things Move to Their Climax

That God is faithful is a constantly repeated axiom of the Scriptures. The prophecy of Genesis 3:15 becomes fulfilled in the action of the Cross and Resurrection. Christ fought the powers of darkness and disarmed them. He was sent to 'destroy the works of the devil', and this he did by taking the guilt of the sinful human race. By death he defeated 'him who has the power of death, even the devil'. He defeated the power of death—which is the out-come of guilt—and so, paralysed sin.

We have seen that on this basis Christ is outworking the victory of his Cross at this present time (I Cor. 15:24–28; Rev. 5:1—21:8). Christ is presently smiting the nations with his sword—the word of God—and he is doing this through the church as they proclaim the Gospel.

Where the Gospel is proclaimed so that men and women believe, then strong bastions of the kingdom of darkness are broken down, and captives are liberated. When this Gospel has been preached to all nations, then will the end come.

History, then, is the movement of the kingdom of darkness to defeat the Kingdom of God, as also it is the Kingdom of God setting about the defeat of Satan and his kingdom. The biblical account shows that Satan cannot win. Whilst the actions of the beasts and Babylon are horrific, and seemingly triumphant, they are allowed only a certain period of time and a specified amount of action and the time of their judgement will come.

The Ignominious End of All Evil

The Book of the Revelation spends little time describing the end of evil. It is more a book for the saints who presently suffer than for mere gloating over evil's end. As evil works itself up to its own climax the time for judgement ripens, and God moves in swiftly to close off the historic period in which evil has been allowed to exist. We see this partly in the judgements that come on the kingdom of darkness, e.g. Revelation 16:10, 'The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was in darkness; men gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores, and did not repent of their deeds'.

These partial judgements and momentary reprieves move all history towards the judgement and destruction of Babylon who has dominated the nations with its powerful

world system. The next phase is the destruction of the leading powers of the kingdom of evil. In this the warring of the One on the White Horse is against those nations who would war with him. In this fierce campaign the beast and his cohorts are defeated and slain. Likewise, following the period of a thousand years—when the martyred saints reign with their Lord—evil draws up all its reserves, co-ordinates them, and sets about defeating the camp of the saints, only to be consumed by fire from heaven, at which time the devil is thrown into the lake of fire with the beast and the false prophet, *and that is the end of all evil!*

So quickly and simply does all this happen that we might be deceived into thinking it could have happened sooner, and the world would have been saved the deception of evil and its terrible oppression. Such thinking is wrong. Until evil has reached the pitch at which it may be judged, God does not move, for any judgement would then be premature.

The Ultimate Triumph of God

We may be so preoccupied with the defeat of evil that we miss the goal of history—the revelation of the glory of God and the glorification of all things. There can be no doubt that for millenniums the human race has puzzled on the seeming inability of God to effect a quick, sharp, decisive and complete victory over the power of evil. The reason—as we have partly pointed out—is related to the nature of true morality. A moral being is one who has choice. Simply to destroy creatures which have choice because they make the wrong choice is obviously no true

victory. Each creature must be allowed to run its course—however fearful and evil that may be. Ultimately it must be judged by its own behaviour, its own choices. Against the purity of the Creator it must be shown to be wrong, and in one sense to reveal its own evil.

The judgements of God, therefore, are one of the most critical elements in history. Christian theodicy has always sought to justify God in the way He has gone about His creation, His dealings with it, and His ultimate judgements. There must be no apology for God, no thinking of Him as other than a faithful Creator who cannot deny Himself. He must work as He is, and our failure to understand God draws us into wrong assessments of His work and action. The event of Christ—his life, Cross and Resurrection—is the expression and fulfilment of the true wisdom of God. In the Cross he defeats darkness, and vindicates his own holiness. The history which issues from the historic events of Christ in Incarnation, Atonement and Ascension are therefore wholly moral. The judgements that eventually come upon moral creatures are truly moral. Hence the Book of the Revelation comes to its richest climax when it shows the absolute rightness of God's judgements.

On this score, evil—far from having the slightest grandeur—is shown to be morally bankrupt, fearfully evil, without any true moral result or residue and worthy only of the second death, the lake which burns and torments. How true this assessment is can only be seen in the light of the revelation of God in His utter holiness. No one can argue it from a merely intellectual point of view. To see God is to understand all, as it is to raise—as authentic—all that God has done.

The beauty, therefore, of the new world, is the richest vindication possible of God's plan for, and handling of, history. No ascription of God can be total, since the lesser cannot magnify the greater, yet the ascriptions of the four celestial living creatures, along with the elders and the numberless angels are fitting to express the goodness of God and His eternal Kingdom. Yet, since the elect of the human race are innumerable, and they have tasted the riches of God's grace, and since their redemption has hung upon His love, their witness to God is of the highest order. Being at first 'to the praise of the glory of his grace', and then 'to the praise of his glory', the elect can join the whole vast body of worshippers to ascribe glory and power and honour and wisdom and might both to God and the Lamb.

One of their number—Paul—even in his earthly and as yet unglorified state could give that statement and ascription which is one of the richest in the vast treasures of Christian worship:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
 How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!
 'For who has known the mind of the Lord,
 Or who has been his counsellor?'
 'Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?'
 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be
 glory for ever. Amen.

Thus the prayers of many millenniums have found their answer and fulfilment, i.e. those of the elect who have prayed:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy
 will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

ESSAY ONE

The Saga of the Saviour and Satan

The Need to Have an Overall View of the Battle Between Christ and Satan

The structure of our book is such that we do not achieve a running and complete description of the battle between Christ and Satan. Doubtless this can be abstracted from the whole book and put together, and this in fact we do here. Just as our next essay speaks of man as being the battleground of God and Satan, so that we discover where the battle is centred, so in this essay we see the continuity

of the action of Christ and Satan as they battle out the matter of history within the created universe.

It is no small matter to attempt such a story or saga seeing that from time to time Satan is depicted in language which describes him literally, whilst at other times it is apocalyptic language, i.e. visionary and symbolical, so that it is difficult to pick out what is literal and historical, and what is actual though not literal, as it is signified by prophetic language. Even so, we can grasp something of the nature of the conflict which has enveloped the world from the time of man's fall from his original creation by God in His image.

Satan at the Beginning

In previous chapters we have dealt with the fact that although Satan and evil are practical realities which we face, there is no ontological beginning to Satan and evil. Satan was a celestial creature of beauty and authority who became self-infatuated and—we may say—self-induced his character as evil. His appearance in the garden as 'that ancient serpent' nominates him as 'the devil and Satan'.

New Testament passages show us that 'the Word' or 'the Son'—the one who later became incarnate and was called 'Jesus', 'the Son of Man' and 'the Christ'—was the one who created all things. Called 'the firstborn of all creation' he was the one who was not created but had pre-eminence in all creation. With the Father and the Spirit he created and upholds all things, causing them to consist and subsist in himself.

Envy, Accusation and Indictment

The Book of Revelation, in speaking of Satan as 'that ancient serpent, the devil', gives a clue as to the time when Satan was involved in speaking against created man. In Revelation 12:10 he accuses the brethren 'day and night before our God'. In Job chapters 1 and 2 he questions the integrity of the man Job, and would test out that integrity. One righteous man witnesses to what the grace of God can do with fallen man. The accusation against Joshua the high priest in the Book of Zechariah seems well based, but grace again thwarts him. His accusation to Michael the archangel concerning Moses was also thwarted. If Satan was initially not a direct adversary of God—the word Satan means 'adversary', and in Numbers 22:22 is even used of God—then it appears that he turned from being one who tested integrity to one who did not believe in it. Thus we can see the root of the constant drive of sinful man to establish his own righteousness and in doing so to accuse others of unrighteousness and so despise them (cf. Luke 18:9).

The deep envy of man who was alone created in the image of God, caused the serpent to use his deceitful and seductive powers to separate man from God and so to be-come degraded and depraved. This was the first attack on the glory, dignity and vocation of man. Primarily it was an attack upon the Creator-Word, i.e. the Creator-Son. It was—at the same time—an attack upon the plan of God.

The initial result of the Fall must have appeared a victory to Satan, but the proto-evangel of Genesis 3:15 prophesied that the seed of the very woman he had deceived would crush Satan at his head—the seat of his life

and intelligence. That is, a human being would ‘destroy the works of the devil’. From that point onwards there was always a fly in the ointment of ‘the prince of the power of the air’, the ‘prince [or god] of this world system’. At any moment a child of the woman could be born which would destroy the Evil One. Doubtless he was ever watchful to discern such a birth and to destroy the chosen infant. Far from being secure in his own brilliance and prowess the prince of darkness has always had apprehension and fear. Over him has always been a cloud of doom and gloom. His has always been an unenviable position.

The very first child of the first human union was a murderer, and was called ‘the child of the devil’ (I John 3:10–11). The purpose of the Word or Christ seemed to be defeated in this further satanic act, but whilst death cut off Abel the prophet of God, his very death has been a dynamic witness to God, whilst Cain’s death is of no consequence to the human race. The battle had begun!

The Continuing Battle

We might call the battle, ‘The Saga of the Seed’. The word ‘seed’ is significant in the Old Testament, and the New. In Galatians 3:15–18 Paul brings up the matter of the seed of Abraham through which the blessing of Abraham was to come to the nations, and he says the seed was Christ Jesus. Abraham had been an idolater along with his family. This meant that he was already allied with demonic powers. However, God revealed his glory to Abraham who became a believer and was justified. Brought into

covenant relationship with God he was allied with Christ—whether he knew that consciously or not: ‘Before Abraham was, I am’, and, ‘Abraham rejoiced to see my day’.

It is no coincidence that Ishmael was a child born of the flesh, and Isaac a child born of the Spirit. It was no accident that Esau was a secular (profane) man, and Jacob the intended seed through whom the blessing would come, even through his seed Judah whose special descendant would be the ruler to whom—and under whom—all the nations would assemble in obedience. This Ruler was to be Jesus the Messiah.

The Battle of the Idols

We have noted that Satan held demonic sway where idolatry obtained. As now, so then, the idols surrounded the people of God, but Christ was with his people. He was the rock who was smitten for them in the wilderness, he was the food that fed them in the wilderness. He was ever at hand to guide and protect his people. It was his glory Isaiah saw in the temple ‘when he spoke of him’. With chastisement and encouragement Israel—i.e. the true and holy remnant of that nation—fought the demonic forces and defeated idolatry as a national sin and custom. In the ultimate Satan did not win in Israel by the idols, for the holy remnant was the matrix of Messiah. He was the child born to rule the nations with a rod of iron.

The Coming of the Ruler-Child

We have seen that the woman—Israel, the true people of God—brought forth a man child who was to rule the

nations, and the dragon—Satan—sought to destroy him, even by the massacre of the Innocents, but he did not succeed. The child became the man of the Cross, Resurrection and Ascension, being caught up to God and His throne.

The basic attempt to destroy him was the event of the temptations in the wilderness. The devil used his ancient seductive and deceptive abilities, but they were of no avail. The promised Messiah was the man of the word of God, and simply outfaced the devil by the sharp two-edged sword of the word. This event was one of the few direct encounters which the Messiah had with the devil. We may call Peter's attempt to direct Christ away from the Cross as an encounter, for Jesus told his disciple, 'Get thee behind me, Satan', but that was primarily an in-direct encounter. Satan's later attempt to make Peter's faith fail was also thwarted by Christ.

Doubtless, the opposition by the demons could be counted as some form of opposition, but if so, it was powerless, for the demons quailed under the Holy One and begged not to be sent to the place of torment—the abyss—before the due time. Doubtless—since Jesus called the Jewish leaders 'children of their father, the devil'—the Jewish leaders were instruments in satanic hands. Judas Iscariot in another way was also a child of the devil by the time betrayal arrived. Even so, the next direct conflict was that of the Cross.

The Decisive Battle of the Cross

Jesus had said to those who came to take him in the garden—the point where Judas betrayed him with a

kiss—'Now is your hour and the power [authority] of darkness'. He had anticipated this occasion. He had said, 'Now is the judgement of this world. Now is the prince of this world cast out'. He also said, 'The ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me'. He did indicate, however, that he would give that ruler some power over him as he took upon himself the sins of the world.

It was, then, the hour of darkness. In that darkness Christ was delivered to the Cross by lying witnesses and unjust judgement. Yet it was in his hours of suffering within the darkness that was across the face of the land, that the battle with Satan took place. The writer of Hebrews said that it was through death Jesus defeated him who had the power (*kratos*—might—but not *exousia*—authority) of death, even the devil. Paul said that Christ put Satan, and the evil principalities and powers, into shameful disarray by bearing the guilt of the law in his death, thus setting men free from the domination of sin and the law. By doing this, mankind was set free from satanic domination, for the very world system of Satan was crucified, and with the world, so was the flesh. Indeed, so was sinful Adamic humanity. This could be said to be fulfilment of the statement, 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil'. Destroying the works of the devil—from beginning to end—was no small task, but it was completed. Psalms 22 and 69—both being so evidently Messianic Psalms—depict the dreadful nature of the suffering as hordes of evil sought to destroy Christ. Much of the New Testament is given to showing the defeat of Satan and his forces at the Cross, for the Atonement is the means whereby God delivered man.

The Proclamation of Victory

The strange little account tucked away in Matthew 27:51–53 of some of ‘the saints who had fallen asleep’ coming to resurrection from the dead seems to have no great point unless it is to show, i.e. to witness to, the resurrection power released by the event of the Cross. Peter speaks of Jesus, ‘being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit; in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison’ (I Pet. 3:19). This has been variously interpreted but it seems to be understood that he proclaimed his victory over evil powers chained in the darkness of Hades by telling them of that victory. That his resurrection brought victory is shown in statements such as in Hebrews 1:3 and 10:13, namely that he now expected all his enemies to be put under his feet. Indeed I Corinthians 15:24–28 makes this very clear. He had irreversibly defeated all enemies. Now he would subjugate them forever.

The Power of the Resurrection

Not only was Christ’s power shown to be greater than that of the devil, for he indeed rose from the grave and defeated death, but the power of his life was now resident and active in the world, and amongst his own people—his newly born church. This was a power Satan could not subvert since it liberated his former slaves from his cruel domination, as it also gave them new life in this world and powerful hope for the age to come.

The Power of the Ascension

‘Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?’. This was the question the risen Christ posed to his disciples. He had told them that the Spirit would convict the world of righteousness, ‘because I go to the Father and you see me no more’. The acceptance of him by the Father meant heavenly enthronement, and so the proof of his true righteousness. Perhaps the angelic powers were stronger than he, seeing he was a man who had been crucified and died, but then he was declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead, for the Father raised him by His own glory, and set him at His own right hand. Every reference to the Ascension is an affirmation of his defeat of Satan, of having settled the score of evil rebellion, and of now being ‘far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come’. Messiah is received into heaven ‘until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old’, i.e. until Christ, having defeated evil, judges the world and sets up his eternal Kingdom in the name of, and for the glory of, the Father.

The writer of Hebrews confirms this high estate of Christ above all the angels in the 1st and 10th chapters of his Letter. The Ascension is the vantage point from which the battle is carried on with that arch-enemy and ape of God—Satan. The enemies of God shall be made his foot-stool.

The Constantly Continuing Conflict

The final putting down of the enemy is the present process of history, which is the outcome of the victory of the Cross and Resurrection. The Book of the Revelation—as we constantly see—is the detailed description of the outworking of I Corinthians 15:24–28. In others of our studies we have pointed out that the defeat of Satan is a moral one. That is, it is not simply a literal and physical destruction of the forces of evil, especially those who are allied with the dragon, his first and second beast, and Babylon the unclean city. Since spiritual weapons are not physical ones, and since they fight the battle on spiritual and moral grounds and not physical and political ones, then it would seem that the saints are defeated and subdued in this present evil age. This would of course appear to be true from the point of view of evil, but from the point of view of truth, evil powers had failed to genuinely subdue the people of God.

It is difficult to give a chronology of events in this present age, but it is clear that the backlash of evil against its past defeat and its coming inevitable destruction is fierce and strong. Threats, deceit and seduction are the evil order of these days. Iniquity will grow more and more. Men will hasten to and fro upon the earth. In the church—the temple of God—the man of sin (the satanic son of perdition) will seek to give himself out as God, and be worshipped, too, as God, for he will evidence signs and wonders as did Messiah. Yet the end of this evil is assured, for since it is not moral and spiritual it is not authentic, and so cannot produce a lasting result. It is in the eye of Messiah and he will destroy the lawless one,

the son of perdition, by the breath of his mouth (i.e. the Spirit and the word of God), and Satan he will destroy ‘by his appearing and coming’. Meanwhile, prior to that ending, the moral and spiritual evil continues after the fashion of a horrible charade.

The People of God Fight With the Messiah

Many are the evidences that the new people of God—the church—fight along with their Lord. In one sense they are the embodiment of their Head, especially in the struggle against evil. Yet it seems they are a weak people, unable to conquer the forces against them.

To the contrary: the very submission of the saints, and their seeming mildness is in fact the use of weapons deadly to the forces of darkness. Christ, who submitted ‘through weakness’ to crucifixion and being placed in the grave, is the one whose moral powers are invested in his people. As he smites the nations with the word of God—the sword of his mouth—so too do his people with him. This must be the story of the conquest of nations by the Gospel, each soul won being a bastion broken down and captured for Christ. Each soul is prized clear of the grasp of the satanic lord, the Beelzebul of the dark kingdom.

Evil powers gather the kings of the earth to fight Christ and his forces, for, ‘they will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful’. All this is proceeding in the present age. Paul describes this process of history as the patient triumph of Christ who—though he appear weak to *macho* evil—is presently ‘filling up all things’, ‘reconciling all things’,

‘harmonizing all things’ and ‘unifying all things’. This is a processive and progressive course that is being filled out until one day that work shall be revealed as the true Holy City, the final Bride of the great Bridegroom, as the Holy People of God without spot and blemish and before Him in love. Whilst evil has been about its connivings, its political endeavours and its mischief—all of which produce nothing—Christ has been accomplishing the complete plan of God—the revelation of His glory, and eternal securing of His holy Kingdom.

It is an age, then, which calls for the patient endurance of the saints, for their patient endurance is in the spirit of Christ’s ‘weakness’, and in the glory of his righteousness. This is what wins the battle. The saints ‘conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name’. The martyrs unhinge the power of darkness by their very being as martyrs. Their great love destroys the power of the hatred of evil. They seek not their own revenge, knowing he will avenge them, and give them glory. They are glad to be one with their blessed Lord!

The Final Conflicts

The 19th chapter of Revelation shows one of the last battles. In this Christ is shown as seated upon a white horse. He—Christ—is called ‘Faithful and True’. Whether this is the same battle indicated in 14:14, or the one as depicted in chapter 17 is not certain, but the same *principle* is operative. In chapter 12 Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. In chapter 19 it is Christ who judges in righteousness and makes war.

Such righteousness is devastating to the evil army. ‘The armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses.’ Elsewhere this white raiment is described as ‘the righteous deeds of the saints’, and so is fearfully formidable to the opposing arm of evil which is necessarily clothed in its own loathsome garments of evil deeds.

In this penultimate battle the beast, the false prophet and the kings and people who had been allied with the beast are all destroyed. The word of God destroys them—the sword of Christ the Faithful and True.

The Thousand Years of Non-Conflict

This period of history has excited enormous interest and whilst we do not here seek to explain it, it is seen as a time in which Satan’s power is held in restraint, and the victory of Christ and his martyrs is celebrated, great authority being given to these holy martyrs. At the end of this time Satan is loosed from his prison and hastens to deceive ‘Gog and Magog’—the nations which are at the four corners of the earth. These nations converge on ‘the camp of the saints and the beloved city’, i.e. on the people of God. The final assault of evil is made under Satan.

Strangely enough we do not see Christ as being in this last battle. In fact it is no battle. Fire comes down out of heaven and consumes the enemy army. The devil is thrown into the lake of fire—‘the second death’. Then the whole race of humanity is brought before the throne of God, and is judged. Those who do not go to perdition are the ones whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

He has saved them from the ultimate death when the kingdom of darkness is shattered and disbanded forever.

Christ the Conquering King

It is noticeable in all that we have written in this essay that Christ has little contact with Satan. It is as though Satan has no real standing in the eyes of heaven. Whilst it is a *fact* that Satan seeks to dethrone God and His Christ, yet the *truth* is that such an endeavour cannot succeed. Jesus certainly had dialogue with Satan at the time of the temptations in the wilderness, but he was not at his wit's end, and succeeded in discomfiting the devil. Whilst Satan sought to subvert him through Peter, and destroy him through Judas Iscariot, yet these attempts amounted to nothing. Doubtless in the Cross there was that conflict which can mostly be called 'hand-to-hand', yet in fact the glory of Christ in his utter holiness means that Satan had no real grip upon him. He was hopelessly outclassed by this righteous Prince of Peace, and defeated forever by that most holy death. The Resurrection placed Christ forever beyond his grip, and the Ascension became a thing of terror to him. The final battles in the campaign seem to offer so much to the prince of darkness, but his end is the lake burning with fire and brimstone.

Our Part in His Victory

Much of the battle of which we have spoken is still in progress. The glory of prophecy is its sure promise, and its basis for true hope. Christ is our Conquering King and

we do worship him. The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus, and we are grateful for what it tells us, and the certainty it inspires within us.

It is as simple as this, 'Jesus is Lord!'. That is our certainty and all else follows it.

ESSAY TWO

*Man: the Battleground
of the Two Kingdoms***Man and the Misery of Evil**

Something will be missing in our book if we do not look at the personal plight of man. We mean by this, man in all that has happened to him in his history, and the prophetic word concerning his future and his ultimate vocation. We can certainly speak of the conflict of two kingdoms, but in one sense both those kingdoms work out their defeat and victory at the centre of man—his heart, mind and will. He is the battleground of the two kingdoms as they war. Yet he is not a passive battleground, as though he had no say or part in the matter. He has a will, and that will causes him to participate in the issues of God and evil.

The History of Man as a Creature of Will

When God decided to make man in His own image that had to mean that man was a person of will. True moral being involves the ability and opportunity to make choices. The choice would have to be a real one. God is not a creature that He should make choices, but the Creator, and we cannot envisage what it is for the Creator to make choices. We assume that in fact He makes no choices—as we know them—but simply acts from His wisdom.

Man being the image of God could reflect God, but not be God. He could not even be the tiniest portion of God, any more than even a tiniest portion of him could be God in any way. He was creature from beginning to end. In being a free creature he was given the ability to make choices. Normally his choice would be 'for God' since God created him. When the serpent, who was certainly subtle, called God's authority into question, especially His authority to command the man and the woman not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, then the woman, too, began to question God's motive for this prohibition. The questioning constituted a break in relationship with God, and soon the woman disobeyed the prohibition, the man quickly following her leadership. The woman played the word of the serpent over against the word of God, and the man played the word of the woman over against the word of God.

The fascination of the illicit is still with man. Though he has separated himself from God relationally he knows he has an accountability towards God (Rom. 1:32; 3:19), and so has constantly to make choices against the will or law of God. Infatuated by the thought of freedom he

pursues his own way, i.e. his autonomy. It appears to be easy to go one's own way, but it constantly demands decisions which cannot be made in the context of truth. Without God's guidance man must call upon his own (so-called) wisdom. Because his wisdom does not accord with the true nature of the universe he begins to suffer misery.

Man suffers misery because he is out of context and out of harmony with God's created universe. His whole being is so structured that he must know, love and trust God, for by reason of such love he will be one with God, i.e. as a human being is created to be at one with God. Denying himself this harmony, nothing is truly functional and real. Man is always away from the true reality of his own essential being. He may appear to have snatches of such real experience, but the snatches are rare, the times when the image of God in him expresses itself, almost in spite of himself. For the most part he is a lost creature without knowing he is lost, and a creature dead to God without knowing he is dead. The Scriptures speak of him as being dead to God and lost in the creation, but Scriptural references as such will not make him see his condition. He is always thinking that his death-state is life, and that he is not lost in his universe, since he has taken great pains to make a 'home' for himself.

Man Without Freedom

Man does not realize that he is in bondage. Again, he may have flashes of recognition from time to time. He will suddenly glimpse a sight of his bondage, but will be unable to believe it, and certainly he will not see

the magnitude of this bondage. For example, he will not recognize how afraid he is of death, and how that fear really arises from fear of judgement. Whilst he has a sense of accountability, his own sin has an inbuilt deceit which reassures him he has not failed miserably. Indeed, guilt carries an anaesthetic of its own, so that it becomes tolerable—otherwise the full pain of guilt would destroy him here and now.

Satan and his evil forces have no pity for anything or anyone created in the image of God. They hate God and so they hate the image. Not even man's fall has eliminated the image of God. It remains to torture man and to infuriate evil forces, for—even at its worst—it is a reminder of God. Whilst Satan is called a 'father' of his captive creatures—men and women—yet he cannot be a father to them. He devises misery for man.

Evil's power lies in accusation. Accusation is sharp and painful by reason of man's accountability to God and His law. There is something of painful venom in accusation, gossip and slander. Evil powers endlessly accuse humanity, and humanity suffers the agony of anticipating the wrath and judgement of God. It argues against such wrath, saying that God could not be like that—He could not judge and punish man—but his conscience gives the lie to the reason of the perverted mind.

Even though the human mind attempts to rationalize away the judgement of God, the very mind of man is busy working at two justifying elements, (a) to justify itself before men, and (b) to justify oneself in one's own eyes. This is a lifelong operation, for every suggestion of a person's failure brings that one to self-proving, self-vindicating and self-justifying. Life is a never ending

action of seeking the praises of men, and so avoiding conflict and confrontation. The effort of self-assurance is demanding, and never comes to a successful conclusion.

Men and women go to every kind of extreme to feel right in life, right with all things, right with circumstances and environment, right with society, and especially, right with God, even though one may be called an atheist. This 'being right' never really comes to pass. Man lives in agonies because he cannot 'make it', i.e. cannot be at peace with himself because he is not at peace with God. It seems no one has ever gone to any length to show how insistent man is on being recognized as 'good' and 'righteous'. Indeed it would take much to compute his self-justifying efforts, since almost every moment of his life is occupied in doing this. His vocation, his relationships, his ambitions, his thoughts and activities are pressed into the service of self-justification. Man has devised brilliant systems of religion and philosophy to vindicate himself. Some of these systems are cruel, ruthless and relentless. They take much time, worship, religion and devotion, and in the end they give man nothing.

The Cruelty of the Lords and Idols

Much has been said in this present book about the domination of idols. They are demanding lords which promise much but can give nothing. What man wants he extrojects from himself, projecting it on to the idols or lords. The idols and lords appear to promise much but they are simply the visualization of the mind of the person. Evil

promptly snaps up all visualization and turns it to its own benefit, weaving lies of the visions and dreams of men. Man himself thinks he is creating reality when he visualizes something. It was said of man before the flood that 'every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually'. Since man's imagination is not under the control of God it devises systems of its own, and then declares them to be reality! How painfully it builds its ideals, its utopias and its kingdoms—all of which are in conflict with the truth of God, His creation, and His Kingdom.

Man must utilize all thought and action to help him to rest from the compulsive guilt drive which goads him on. Such is this element of the misery of man.

The lords, gods, and idols give nothing. This is an inflexible rule. They surely promise much, but are liars. So does God promise, but He fulfils His promises for He cannot lie. Power to fulfil proper promises does not lie within the scope of evil. Man, then, is mocked by the powers which make promises. He cannot be given the righteousness which would calm his conscience. He cannot know the peace and joy which are essential for true human living. His emotional and affectional yearnings can know only temporary slaking by the relationships he has with others. He is a Sisyphus forever rolling his stone—his burden—up to the crest of the hill only for it to fall back and roll down before he can rest it on the height.

Out of these failures develops compounding anger, and this destroys a man since 'passions rot the bones'. Man, we say, is in the deepest of miseries. We take it that medieval depictions of little devils with pitchforks and hot pokers were not meant literally even by the medievalists,

but represented the worst they could think, so deep was their terror and suffering from unseen evil accusers. None can describe the suffering man feels in his depths because of his abysmal failure, his non-accomplishment, and own ineradicable guilts. The bitter, cynical and nasty features of these twisted puckish creatures were the expression of how man felt evil in his bones. To personalize it helped him to see the anguish which was attacking him from the forces of evil. Even so, man feels rather than visualizes the painful piercings, the mocking accusations, and the diabolic accusations of demons and evil spirit voices. Sometimes the accusations are crude. Sometimes they seek to visualize filth and immorality, but mostly they are clever, posing to be the very thoughts of the person himself, when indeed they are from the outside.

The Cruelty of Man's Sins

If evil powers from outside a person insinuate themselves into his very thoughts, then no less do the accomplished sins of a person haunt, accuse and terrify him. David pleaded with God, 'Remember not the sins of my youth'. Job said, 'Thou makest me to inherit the iniquities of my youth'. Such iniquities have power. It was David who cried:

For evils have encompassed me
without number;
my iniquities have overtaken me,
till I cannot see;
they are more than the hairs of my head;
my heart fails me.

He pleaded:

'O Lord, be gracious to me;
heal me, for I have sinned against thee!'

On another occasion he said:

There is no soundness in my flesh
because of thy indignation;
there is no health in my bones
because of my sin.
For my iniquities have gone over my head;
they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.

On yet another occasion he said:

my strength fails because of my misery,
and my bones waste away.

One of his most telling statements regarding the fierce nature of sin when it was in a man, unconfessed, was:

When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

In Isaiah 1:2–6 the prophet points out two sad things, the first being the utter sinfulness of Israel, God's people, and the second being the utter sickness and disease which had come as a result of sin. He repeats this principle of vexing sin in 24:4–13. Jeremiah repeats this law of sin and death many times. He sees the pollution that goes deeply into the people, for God says:

Though you wash yourselves with lye
and use much soap,
the stain of your guilt is still before me.

Man, then, carries within himself a pack of wolves—his sins—and these tear and ravage him all the day long. He carries the things of shame—his sins—for their pollution lies heavily upon him. He dreads the judgement to come, the wrath to be poured out, and the death which will finally claim him. He labours hard to prove himself a righteous person, and his failure is intolerably bitter. He has the mark of Cain, the number of the beast, the identification with evil.

If we had to view man's evil apart from Christ's Golgotha we might destroy ourselves. As it is, the Cross is the only place where we dare see our sins, for there we see them defeated, and their purification is the great and beautiful miracle of grace.

The Cruelty of Man Against Man

It was Burns who said, 'Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn'. The spectre and dread of man is always with us. Man may rationalize his sad situation as God being perversely opposed to him, but when he faces the immediate cruelty of his neighbour in homicide, fratricide, matricide, patricide and genocide, his heart is sickened. When he views incest and rape, human bestiality, greed, selfishness and cruelty, he knows the bitterness of sin. It is more bitter because he knows—if he will confess it—that the seeds of all sin and cruelty are also within himself.

In trying to total sin we could simply add statement to statement if that would do any good, but after a time the mind numbs, and cannot sense the full evil of man. Even

so, we ought to look at some of the statements of Scripture for we will not often find such words elsewhere. 'They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land.' 'Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceitfully; with his mouth each speaks peaceably to his neighbour, but in his heart he plans an ambush for him.' 'Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive.' 'The venom of asps is under their lips.' 'Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.' 'Their feet are swift to shed blood, in their paths are ruin and misery.'

Jesus added, 'For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness'. Paul further added the works of the flesh, 'fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like'.

The psalmists write time and again of the evil and treachery of men. The thought of vicious and cunning enemies is constantly in their minds. Paul says, 'For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another'. Peter speaks of those who 'have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin'. He adds, 'For, uttering loud boasts of folly, they entice with licentious passions of the flesh men who have barely escaped from those who live in error'. John the Seer speaks of those who are to be thrown into the lake of fire as 'the cowardly . . . murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars'.

Paul tells us that the law was made especially for ‘the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers’.

Man, then, looks at man, knowing that such cruelty is within the possibility of every human being, no less himself! How dreadful a thing then, to live amongst men and be as them.

Man the Battleground of God and Evil Powers

We can see, then, the misery which man suffers as a result of his separation from God, and his being caught up into the evil system of Satan. So terrible is his plight that writers, poets, novelists, dramatists, sculptors, painters, musicians and lyricists have tried to compass something of its awful nature. Most of the powerful operas have sought to describe the monstrous nature of man in jealousy and passion.

All this given in, no one has been able to fathom the abyss of man’s mind and spirit as he faces his evil and the evil of others. He has deprived himself of glory and descended into the pit of depravity and degradation. The only possible way to understand his misery is to peer into the dark hours of the Cross and hear the most terrible cry of history, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’. To hear this is to hear the terror of God-forsakenness. It is to go out into loneliness that is utter, darkness that is thick and abject. It is to be cut off from God.

We can understand to some degree, the battle that took place upon the Cross as the powers of darkness as a vast and foul horde, descended upon the man Jesus, seeking to destroy him. The acid bitterness and the deadly venom of their accusations must be borne to be known, but then none can bear it apart from the one who bore it—Christ. No one can really understand the nature of sin and evil.

What we can understand is the wretchedness of our own hearts. One part of us recognizes the horrible nature of evil, and another part desires it. We desire to prove ourselves righteous yet can be tempted to the deepest of evil. Hence, when the battle takes place in our breasts, our minds, and in our secret hearts, we are for the enemy as we are against him. We agonize for the good, and live in the torture of the evil. The glory can be supplanted by the depraved. We can never be satiated apart from the love of God, yet seek satiation in other things too dreadful to mention.

This, then, is the battleground called man. This is where God comes to defeat Satan and his forces, and this is where Satan comes to snatch the bodies, souls and spirits of men and women. It is no light conflict, no desultory campaign. It takes the resources of love and grace to defeat the Evil One and win the heart of fallen man to the Father of all spirits, and the Garden of joy, the eternal Eden.

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About this book . . .

- Are there indeed two kingdoms undergoing a struggle for supremacy in history?
- Are these two kingdoms discernible, and does their struggle really affect us today?
- Is there an answer to God's seeming lack of control of history?
- Has Satan or evil any substantial hope of gaining control of history—even if only for a time?
- Can there possibly be any rhyme or reason in the tragedy of human living and the cruel rivalries of the world's nations?
- Will genuine peace come to our world, and if so, how and when?

About the author . . .

Geoffrey Bingham is an Anglican minister. His experience as soldier, prisoner of war, farmer, missionary, writer, teacher and family man, as well as theologian, has given him grounds for writing material which is Australian in tone, and relevant to the society in which we live. Some have found his books life-changing.